

# God's Pursuit

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Good morning, church. My name is Matthew Capone, and I'm the pastor here at Cheyenne Mountain Presbyterian Church, and it's my joy to bring God's Word to you today. Before we get started, I just want to highlight a few announcements. First, this Wednesday, April 29th, at 7 p.m., we're going to have another town hall, a virtual town hall, together as a church, and this is going to be a chance for us to continue to update you on what's going on and how decisions are being made. I really encourage you to be there if you can. The details for that meeting, they're on our website, and of course, as I've been emphasizing, they're also in the Friday email. I'm also excited to announce that we're going to have another congregational prayer meeting on Saturday, May 9th, at 9 a.m., and details about that are also on our website and in the Friday email.

By the way, our website is [www.cmpca.net](http://www.cmpca.net), and you can sign up for our newsletter at the bottom right of every page of that site. Finally, if you're a visitor, we're glad that you're here with us. We'd love for you, if you go to our website, there will be a pop-up, and that pop-up will give you a link to a visitor form, and that gives us a chance to connect with you, so I encourage you to do that.

Finally, for everyone, whether you're new or you're a visitor with us or you're someone who's been with us for many years, I encourage you to take this opportunity to connect with one another over Facebook. So there's a comment box in the bottom right, and as I've been telling you, while you can see me, I can't see you. So I encourage you to log in there and just make a comment like good morning or here, share who's with you and where you're watching from, and that will give us a chance to know who is together this morning. We can see numbers, but we can't always see names, so that's incredibly helpful to us, and it also gives a sense of us being together even as we're separated. With that, we are picking up again in the book of Jonah, and you'll recall that the book of Jonah, first of all, is not a story about a fish. As one man has said, the fish does not have a speaking part, and the fish only appears four times in three verses. And later, a little bit later, I'll talk about why the fish is not our focus. It is, however, the story about a man named Jonah who was a prophet who lived in the northern kingdom of Israel in the 8th or 9th century BC, and God had called this man to go to a city called Nineveh, which was in what is now modern-day northern Iraq, then the kingdom of

Assyria. And as we looked at last week, this was an inside-out story. We were seeing a prophet called to a place that was unexpected. He wasn't going to God's people, but instead he was going to God's enemies. And we also had a prophet who was unexpected. Rather than obeying God, he fled from God.

And so it's not ultimately a story about Jonah, but it's a story about God's mercy. And our theme verse, which we're going to see this week in this chapter is verse 9, which tells us that salvation belongs to the Lord. Last week, we looked at the offensiveness of God's mercy, that he gives it to people we wouldn't give it to, people like Nineveh, and he gives it to people who don't deserve it, people like you and me. We're going to continue to take a look at God's mercy from the book of Jonah this morning in chapter 2. And as you'll recall, Jonah had run away from God, and the last we saw him, he was down in the sea. The sailors, verse 15, had hurled him into the sea. And so Jonah has received God's judgment, while the sailors have received God's mercy. But Jonah's story isn't over. And so our question this morning is this, what does God do when his people run away from him?

[ 3 : 5 1 ] What does God do when his people run away from him? Jonah has run away from God. And so how is God going to show mercy to him? We're in Jonah chapter 2, and I invite you to turn with me, whether you're opening another window on your browser or pulling it up on your phone, or perhaps you have a physical Bible with you. Regardless of how you're reading it, remember that this is God's word. And God tells us that his word is more precious than gold, even the finest gold.

And it's sweeter than honey, even honey that comes straight from the honeycomb. And so that's why we read it now, starting at chapter 1, verse 17. And the Lord appointed a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights. 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 the fish I cried, and you heard my voice. Verse 3. 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. Verse 4. 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 around my head 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. Oh Lord my God.

Verse 7. 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. Salvation belongs to the Lord. And the Lord spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah out.

upon the dry land. I invite you to pray with me as we come to this portion of God's word. Our Father in heaven, we thank you again for speaking to us through your word. We thank you that you give us words that challenge and humble us, and you also give us words that encourage us and lift us up. And we ask that you would do that this morning, that you would humble us, showing us our need for your grace. And you encourage us as you show us how you meet us at that very same point of need. We ask these things not because we've earned them or deserve them, but because we have confidence in Jesus, knowing that we can ask them in his name. Amen.

[ 6 : 51 ] You'll remember from last week that we had this word that was repeated over and over again, which is the word down. We saw that Jonah went down to Joppa to flee from the Lord. He went down into the ship. And then in verse 5, down into the innermost portion of the ship.

The word down isn't repeated then again in chapter 1, but we know that he goes down into the sea because he's thrown overboard. He is fleeing from God. And now we're going to see that same word down repeated again. Verse 6, I went down to the land whose bars closed upon me forever. Jonah is going to continue this experience of going down and we see what it looks like. We're told in verse 2 that he's in the belly of Sheol. Now the belly of Sheol in the Old Testament would have been understood to be the land of the dead.

And so what's being communicated here in poetic language is that Jonah is close to death. He is having a near-death experience. He then goes on to describe for us what that experience looks like in verses 2 through 7.

In verse 3, he's cast into the deep in the heart of the seas. Waves and billows pass over him. So he's surrounded by water, right? He's nearly drowning. In verses 5 and 6, he is trapped by weeds.

[ 8 : 11 ] Weeds are wrapped around his head. He's at the point of utter despair. We're told he's at the roots of the mountains, verse 6, which is poetic language describing for us that he's gone down as far as he can possibly go.

In other words, Jonah is facing death itself. Jonah almost drowns. He's having a drowning experience here. God gives Jonah what he wants.

Jonah experiences the full consequences of his desires. He learns that to flee from God is to run towards death. To flee from God is to run towards death.

God uses these sailors sovereignly to bring Jonah to a realization of this. We saw in chapter 1, verse 15, it was the sailors who hurl him into the sea. And yet in chapter 2, verse 3, Jonah admits that it was God who cast him into the deeps.

Which one is it? Well, it's both, right? God uses these sailors as his instruments to bring judgment to Jonah. We also see, though, that that is not full and final.

[ 9 : 20 ] However, we'll pause for a second here to say this. God is more concerned about our relationship with him than he is about our circumstances. He's more concerned about our relationship with him than our circumstances.

And so God allows Jonah to face the consequences of his decisions in order that he would have clarity about them. God allows Jonah to face the consequences of his decisions so that he would have clarity.

There's what's called by many people here a severe mercy. God allows in his mercy Jonah to experience suffering so that he would finally wake up and understand what he's doing.

And so suffering is, it's not always a punishment. Now it is a punishment in this situation, right? Jonah is in this situation because of his disobedience against God.

In the book of 1 Peter, we talked about different types of suffering. There was general suffering in the world. There was suffering as a result of our personal sin. And then there was suffering for the name of Jesus.

[10:20] Jonah's suffering here would be suffering for his personal sin. Now our suffering that we suffer is not always for the result of our personal sin. However, like Jonah, suffering is always an opportunity for us to remember God and return to him.

Suffering is always an opportunity for us to remember God and return to him. And so God uses Jonah's suffering in this situation to bring him back. Many people have compared the book of Jonah to the story of the prodigal son in Luke chapter 15.

And the same thing is true there. It's when the prodigal son who runs away from his father faces a famine in another land that he's finally willing to return. And so God uses suffering to pull us back to him.

He uses suffering in that way and it's an aspect of his mercy. And so what does God do when his people run away from him? Well, first of all, he uses the consequences of their actions to bring clarity.

God uses the consequences of Jonah's actions to bring him clarity. And he uses the consequences of our actions to bring us clarity as well. God uses our suffering to cause us to remember him and to turn back to him.

[11:38] Of course, that's exactly what we see. Jonah here prays. You'll remember from last week that Jonah had no words to say to God. He fled from God without responding.

And then in verse 5 of chapter 1, when the sailors were praying, Jonah was asleep. This clarity then finally moves Jonah to action.

Verses 1 and 2, he cries out to God. I called out to the Lord out of my distress. You heard my voice. And then in verse 7, we're told, When my life was fainting away, I remembered the Lord, and my prayer came to you into your holy temple.

It's not just here that Jonah has clarity about his situation, but that Jonah acts on that. God uses suffering not just to bring clarity to Jonah, but also to cause him to return.

God uses the consequences not just to bring clarity. God uses consequences to bring us back as well. And so as we see over and over again, then God's mercy towards Jonah in this situation.

[12:45] He hasn't given up on him. He hasn't abandoned him. Instead, he's using very real and present danger to bring him back in touch with reality. And so the good news for us is this.

I can't promise you many things, but I can promise you this. God is using your circumstances to bring you back to him. God pursues you even in your hard-heartedness and your sin.

These are things that are true if you belong to him. God doesn't wait for you to get your act together or to repent before he pursues you. God does not give up.

God knows that sometimes only crisis will cause us to cry out to him. Only crisis and suffering show us our need and our insufficiency.

And that is an act of incredible mercy and grace. God uses consequences to bring clarity. He uses consequences to call us back to him.

[13:55] He uses it to bring us back. And so our suffering, it's an invitation. It's always an invitation to return to God. It can be suffering that we're facing because of the sin in our lives and it can be suffering that we're facing in general, even if it's something that we haven't caused.

Maybe it's you're a rule breaker and you have had years of a reckless financial situation and now you're finally facing bankruptcy.

Maybe you're tired of feeling lonely and you filled that void by a string of a variety of relationships filled with sin and they've left you just as lonely.

Maybe you're a fool. You're never willing to listen to the advice and correction of others and you finally run into the disaster that everyone else was trying to warn you about.

Maybe you're slothful. You're unwilling to do work and you found yourself out of a job once again.

All of these are very real sufferings that are an invitation for us to return to God and go back to him.

[15:04] They're an opportunity that God has to give us clarity about the consequences of our sin, about the ways that we've separated ourselves from him because, of course, God cares much more about our relationship with him than about our circumstances.

Maybe you're a rule keeper and you faced consequences for that. Obedience from your children has been more important to you than your relationship with them.

You'd rather win than learn when you have conflict with family and friends. And suddenly you find yourself all alone.

You've lost those relationships. That's an invitation from God to you to return. Suffering is a chance for us to wake up.

It's a chance for us, like Jonah, to understand the serious situation that we're in because of our sin and also, like Jonah, to cry out to God, knowing that he's a God of mercy and compassion.

[16:13] Suffering is always an opportunity for us to see reality as it is. And it's an opportunity for us to return to God. That return is something that has power.

And it has power because, as we'll see next, God doesn't just pursue, he also rescues. God doesn't just pursue, he also rescues.

It's one thing for Jonah to cry out to God, right, as he's drowning. But, of course, that might not do any good. He might continue to drown and ultimately die.

But that's not what we see in this situation because God answers those who call out to him. And so his rescue is here. Of course, we saw his rescue in verse 17 of chapter 1.

He appoints a great fish to swallow up Jonah. That's God intervening to show him mercy in that situation. But then Jonah also tells us about God's rescue in verse 2.

[17:12] I called out to the Lord, and he answered me. Out of the belly of Sheol I cried, and you heard my voice. Verse 6.

Jonah's been going down, as we've discussed. At the roots of the mountains, I went down to the land. And in this same verse, when he calls out to God, he goes up.

Yet you brought up my life from the pit, O Lord my God. And we see here, then, that God rescues anyone and everyone who cries out to him for help.

The difference in this world is not between those who are good and those who are evil. It's not between good, moral people and wicked, immoral people. The Bible tells us that all of us are full of sin, and we deserve God's judgment.

And so the difference is simply between those who are willing to cry out to God for mercy and those who are not. The challenge of judgment is that everyone deserves it.

[18:17] The offer of mercy is that God gives it to anyone and everyone who asks him for it. That goes back to what we discussed last week, that God's grace, his mercy is offensive because he gives it to people that we would not give it to.

God then uses consequences to bring clarity. He uses consequences to bring people back to him, and he also rescues people from the consequences of their sin.

That's what God does when his people run away from him. That's how God shows mercy. We noted last week that Jonah is supposed to be the character that we associate with.

He was meant as Christians. He was meant to be an Israelite, and the character that the Israelites would associate with in this story, they would think, this is our man. And they would be let down when their hero turns out to be the one who behaves poorly, and the people that they are different from, the sailors, turn out to be the ones who behave well.

Again, in this chapter, this is a way that God uses this book to underscore and highlight his mercy. Why is the Israelite the slow and whiny one? Why is it the sailors who don't know God who pray in chapter one, and God's prophet who knows him, who waits until chapter two to pray?

[19:39] Well, God's mercy is for undeserving people. God offers mercy, as we saw last week, to people we would not offer it to.

God works with people like Jonah, who still don't fully understand his grace. God gives his mercy and his grace to people who don't deserve it.

He gives it to people like Jonah, and he gives it to people like you and me. And so there's something humbling here for us. We are like Jonah. We're meant to see ourselves here as people who are sometimes hard-hearted and reluctant.

People who often run away from God and his commands, run away from the responsibilities that God's given us. And yet there's also something incredibly encouraging. God shows mercy to Jonah,

and God will show mercy to us.

And so why isn't there more emphasis on the fish? Why does the fish only appear four times in three verses? Well, the reason is this.

[ 20 : 49 ] The fish is boring. And the fish is not really that miraculous. It's much easier for a fish to swallow a man who's fallen into the ocean than for God to show mercy to people like you and me.

The fish swallowing Jonah is nothing compared to the miracle of God's grace and his mercy towards this world. And so that's why the fish here is almost a footnote.

This is a hymn to God from Jonah, a prayer. That's not about the fish, but it's about God's salvation. It's a salvation that he's shown to Jonah. Of course, we finally and fully see this mercy in the person of Jesus.

Jesus came and lived in this world as a real man, in real time and real space. And he was like us because he was a man. And he was also not like us.

He was not like us because he lived a perfect life that we should have lived. And he died a death that we should have died. And so he shows God's pursuing mercy.

[ 22 : 00 ] He shows how God treats people who run away from him. He runs after them. We saw that Jonah cries out from the belly of Sheol, the land of the dead, but he doesn't end there.

Jesus actually does go down to Sheol. He goes to the land of the dead. He dies on our behalf.

Jesus comes and pursues those who are fleeing him.

Jonah escapes death. Jesus accepts death. Christ comes and goes through death in order to pay the penalty for our sins.

Even in our sin, God chases after us. And so this motivates us, like Jonah, to return to him. We know that God's mercy and his grace are for us.

God is pursuing us even as we run away from him. And so how is it that God responds when his people run away from him? Well, he responds in the way that he responded to Jonah.

[ 23 : 07 ] He uses consequences to bring clarity. He uses consequences to bring us back to him. And finally, through Jesus' death, he removes and saves us from the consequences of our sin.

And so we can summarize the answer to that question in this chapter with Jonah's words in verse 9.

But I, with the voice of thanksgiving, will sacrifice to you what I have vowed I will pay.

Salvation belongs to the Lord. Amen. Please pray with me. Our Father in heaven, we thank you that if we're still alive in this world, our story is not over.

And we thank you that as we face suffering, we know that you haven't abandoned us. But instead, you're pursuing us. You invite us to return back to you. We ask that you would do that this morning by your spirit.

That you'd move in our hearts to understand your grace, the depth of your love for us. That even as you loved a small and whiny and negligent prophet, so you also love us.

[ 24 : 18 ] Please use that in our lives to draw us back to you. Just like Jonah crying out to you for mercy and being restored. We thank you that we don't have to earn any of these things or deserve them.

Because we ask them in the name of Jesus. Amen. As we end our time together, I'm going to give you a benediction.

I'll remind you that a benediction is a good word from God. It's a word that's true in the midst of a world filled with words that are not true. It's tradition for the minister to hold up his hand to send out God's blessing on God's people.

And for God's people to hold out their hands to receive God's blessing. And so even as we're separated by a screen, I invite you to hold out your hands. And so hear now God's good word over you from Numbers chapter 6.

The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you. The Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace now and forever.

[ 25 : 22 ] And so go now in the grace and peace of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.