As we continue this series, ***Jonah: Mercy Beyond Boundaries***, we will dive deep into Jonah 2:1-10, “Prayer in the Depths,” which is a confession wrapped in thanksgiving, breathed out by a broken prophet from the absolute darkest place imaginable—the literal belly of a great fish at the bottom of the Mediterranean Sea.

Many of us are first- or second-generation immigrants. We know what it means to survive by grit, hard work, and sheer willpower. We fought to get our degrees recognized, fought to buy a home, and fought to build a life here. But sometime we cannot fight our way out of a spiritual, emotional, or relational storm.

Jonah 2 is not just about a man in a fish - It’s about what happens when life swallows you whole, when you are overwhelmed by fear, when you feel trapped, when you feel isolated, and when you feel like you’re sinking.

When life crashes down, our immediate instinct is to fight, scream, and tread water until we are completely exhausted. I some time would suggest a counterintuitive strategy: **Instead of fighting the "trying moments," allow yourself to "sink to the bottom."**

By letting go of our self-reliance and hitting the bottom, we create the necessary space for divine intervention and spiritual clarity. We shift from frantic resistance to complete dependence on God's saving grace and see how He can work in and through us in such trying circumstances.

God often uses the depths of our circumstances to bring us back to Himself.

Rock bottom becomes a holy ground when we encounter God who responds to humble and honest prayer.

Look at how Jonah describes his dire situation, his rock-bottom moment:

Then Jonah ***prayed to the Lord his God*** from inside the fish. He said, “***I cried out to the Lord*** in my great trouble, and ***he answered me***. I called to ***you*** from the land of the dead, and ***Lord, you*** heard me! ***You*** threw me into the ocean depths, and I sank down to the heart of the sea. The mighty waters engulfed me; I was buried beneath ***your*** wild and stormy waves. Then I said, ‘***O Lord, you have driven me from your presence*** … I sank beneath the waves, and the waters closed over me … I sank down to the very roots of the mountains. I was imprisoned in the earth … But ***you, O Lord my God***, snatched me from the jaws of death! (Jonah 2:1-6 NLT)

Jonah was experiencing the raw consequences of his own choices. He was drowning in the darkness of his own disobedience.

While Jonah had turned his back on God, God had never for one second left him. His hope returns because he shifts his focus away from his bleak circumstances and locks his eyes onto the unmoving reality of God's presence, symbolized by the Temple which is the place where God dwells, where heaven and earth intersects, where revelation, pardon, and forgiveness come together.

Jonah stops looking at the circumstance or feeling paralyzed; instead, he locks his eyes onto the unmoving reality of God's presence.

Hope begins not when trial and testing disappears but when we remember that God is bigger than the trouble we facing.

Cf. I still remember the exact moment when driving to church on that "black Sunday", heading into a gruelling six-hour church meeting where false accusations were being thrown at me. The anxiety was a physical weight in my chest. But as I was driving there on my way, I consciously stopped looking at the impending conflict, prayed, and committed the situation to the Lord. The circumstances didn't instantly change, but remembering His presence completely reset my perspective and trusting in God's sovereignty gave me peace.

While Jonah had turned his back on God, God had never for one second left him. As Jonah prays, he makes a statement that actually exposes his own hypocrisy:

"Those who worship false gods turn their backs on all God's mercies" (Jonah 2:8 NLT)

This is a subtle admission of his own hatred, resentment of being sent to Nineveh; and it needs to be consider in light of what's described earlier:

Jonah is pointing fingers, but the mirror is pointing right back at him. Remember what happened in Chapter 1? The pagan sailors were terrified, praying to their gods, doing everything to save the ship, while Jonah—the theologian-prophet—was asleep in the hold, running away from his assignment. When they asked him what to do, Jonah said, *"Throw me into the sea."* (cf. Jonah 1:9-12)

Jonah identifies himself as a Hebrew who believes in the Creator-God but acts in total opposition to God's will and resents God's mercy toward Nineveh. Here Jonah exposes this egocentric bent:

Our selfish desires override our faith profession and we act as a gatekeeper of divine grace.

Jonah's request to be thrown into the sea is interpreted not as a noble sacrifice, but as a passive-aggressive cop-out! Jonah preferred to die in the ocean rather than obey God and preach mercy to his enemies in Nineveh. He used his religious identity as a shield against obedience.

By choosing death, he attempts to absolve himself of his mission but also exposes his "self-righteous hypocrisy." He is willing to die to save the sailors but he refuses to do anything for Nineveh. His attempt to manipulate the situation through self-sacrifice is actually an act of idolatry.

If idolatry is the search for something or someone that will fulfill personal desires rather than submitting to God's redeeming purpose and plans, then the narrative reveals Jonah's idolatry – he sets himself up as the one who gets the final say about the people he hates.

A disconnect between profession and practice of faith demonstrates "practical atheism" - living as though God is absent, irrelevant, or unwilling to accomplish His purposes.

In a diverse, multicultural hub like Markham-Stouffville, it is easy for us to let our cultural identities, political alignments, or social status override our Kingdom calling. We can easily become "gatekeepers of divine grace," deciding who deserves God's kindness and who doesn't.

Look at all the people around this room today. We are a beautifully diverse congregation reflecting the vibrant tapestry of Markham-Stouffville area. We represent

different generations, cultural backgrounds, languages, and life experiences.

- **The Challenge:** It is easy to form holy huddles with people who look, think, and vote just like us. We want God's grace for people who look like us, talk like us, and share our worldview, but we harbour resentment toward the "Ninevites" in our lives.
- **The Calling:** God calls us to build bridges across these differences.

For us in Markham, **growing deeper and wider in our discipleship** means making sure our faith isn't exclusive. Whether you are a senior who has walked with Christ for fifty years, a young professional navigating the corporate world, or a teenager trying to figure out your identity, God is inviting you into a deeper, resilient faith. We don't just want a large crowd; we want a deeply rooted people.

When we intentionality listen to a brother or sister from a different generation or cultural background, we are doing the hard, beautiful work that Jonah initially refused to do. We are proving that the Gospel is bigger than our divisions.

Jonah's greatest problem wasn't the storm, the sailors, or the fish. **Jonah's greatest problem was Jonah** – his pride, resentment, disobedience, lack of compassion, distorted priorities have separated him from fully sharing God's heart.

"Those who worship false gods turn their backs on all God's mercies" (Jonah 2:8 NLT)

Jonah is confronted by his own idolatry and must be saved from the delusion that he is the arbiter of who deserves God's favour. The text reinforces that God alone determines the distribution of mercy.

God is not only interested in changing Jonah's location—from the fish to dry land—but also in changing Jonah's character.

Everything about Jonah is going down - he goes down to Joppa, down into the bottom of the ship, and down into the heart of the sea, the absolute bottom, which is the land of the dead - until the text reaches 2:9, when he confesses that salvation belongs to the Lord alone, everything turns upward - God speaks, the fish vomits him up, and Jonah goes up to Nineveh.

But I will offer sacrifices to you with songs of praise, and I will fulfill all my vows. For ***my salvation comes from the Lord alone***.[1] (Jonah 2:9 NLT)

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[1] The term "salvation" (**יְשׁוּעָה**) refers to a rescue, deliverance, redemption, and restoration performed by God for his people, healing what is sick, mending what is broken, and making whole what has been shattered.

furious when God applies that exact same rule to save the pagan Ninevites. Jonah is the one who still needs to be saved from his own self-destructive beliefs and behaviours.

Salvation touches the whole person and involves a dynamic process of restoration and transformation.

Jonah’s prayer in the depth reminds us that God's saving work that reaches beneath our circumstances to transform the deepest issues of the human heart.

God was not just interested in changing Jonah’s location from the belly of a fish to dry land; He was interested in changing Jonah’s **character and fulfilling his mission**.

Jonah’s story began with a sad story of a runaway prophet, but it would be a greater tragedy if God had allowed him to keep running.

Biblical salvation is not just a ticket to heaven or a temporary rescue from a bad situation. It is a dynamic, ongoing process that transforms the **whole person**—body, soul, character, and relationships.

Like Jonah, every Christ-follower is a mass of self-contradictions and confusion when under difficult and challenging times.

Self-serving and egocentric attitudes, affections, and actions remain in the hearts of even the most mature Christ-followers.

We often ask God to save us from difficult circumstances, but His greater purpose is to save us from the sin, pride, fear, bitterness, or self-sufficiency that keeps us from reflecting His heart.

We often cry out, *"God, save me from this financial stress! Save me from this difficult marriage! Save me from this health crisis!"* God cares about those things deeply.

But His greater purpose is to save us from the pride, the fear, the bitterness, and the self-sufficiency that keeps us from reflecting His heart to the world around us.

When Jonah finally surrendered to God's sovereign mercy, the fish vomited him up, and he was immediately re-commissioned for his mission.

Holding orthodox and correct biblical truths is not enough; genuine faith is only proven when our lives reflect the character of the God we profess and we participate in His world restoring mission.

To truly believe and pray that *"Salvation belongs to the Lord"* means we need God to save us from ourselves, daily renewing our commitment to live in joyful obedience to His mission.

Jonah's three days and nights point toward the deaths and resurrection of Jesus, underscoring the ever presence of God, the compassion of God, and the persistent saving will of God.

Jonah is not just rescued—he is re-commissioned.

Your rescue is not just for you—it's for God's mission.

Let us stop playing the gatekeepers of grace.

Let us take the mercy we have received at our rock bottoms and freely share that compassion, love, and forgiveness with everyone in our spheres of influence—our neighbours, our co-workers, and yes, even our enemies.

God is not confined to this building. He is already active outside these walls—in our local schools, our community centres, our tech hubs, and the quiet streets of our Markham neighbourhoods.

People across our community already search for hope, belonging, answers, and direction. The question is whether we communicate clearly enough for them to recognize that God is in their neighbourhood and Cornerstone is His hands and feet. Our job isn't to bring God to Markham; our job is to open our eyes and **join God in what He is already doing in our neighbourhood**.

We envision Cornerstone to become a **hub of connection and belonging for the wider community**.

Imagine our building as a place where the lonely find family, where newcomers to Canada find a soft place to land, and where our neighbours experience the tangible love of Jesus. We want the Cornerstone Centre to be a beacon in Markham—a place where anyone, from any walk of life, can step through the doors and immediately feel: *"I belong here."*

Cornerstone becomes a sign of God's global heart.