

Bellowing From The Belly

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Preacher: Rev. Murdo Campbell

[0 : 00] Well if we could this evening for a short while if we could turn back to that portion of scripture that we read in the book of the prophet Jonah and chapter 2.

Jonah chapter 2 and if we just read again from the beginning. We were told there 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 shell I cried and you heard my voice.

You know whenever I read the book, especially chapter 2 of the book of Jonah, I always think that if Jonah had one of the Psalms or if Jonah had one of the Psalms written about him or if he had even a Psalm attributed to him or even if Jonah could tell us what his favourite Psalm was, I would have thought that it would have been the Psalm that we were just singing, Psalm 130.

Because as you know Psalm 130 it's a cry, we were just singing it, it's a cry from the depths. And like Jonah the Psalmist in Psalm 130, he directs his plea to the Lord and he says, Lord from the depths to the I cry, my voice Lord do thou hear unto my supplications voice, give an attentive ear. But you know unlike the Psalmist where his depths were spiritual, the depths that Jonah had reached were both spiritual and physical.

[1 : 40] Because last time about a month ago when we left Jonah at the close of chapter 1, a big fish was closing its mouth over Jonah.

And Jonah you'll remember, he was this disobedient disciple who was running away from the call of God upon his life. Jonah was told to go to Nineveh and yet Jonah went in the opposite direction towards Tarshish.

But the amazing thing is that the Lord had to stop Jonah in his tracks. And in order to even preserve the lives of those who were on the boat with him in chapter 1, Jonah were told he was hurled overboard into the fierce storm on the Mediterranean Sea and then he was swallowed by a big fish. But now in chapter 2, the chapter we're coming to this evening, we're given an understanding as to what went on inside the belly of this big fish. And as you would expect, that Jonah was crying to the Lord, he was crying from out of the depths.

Jonah was in many ways he was bellowing from the belly of the big fish. Jonah was bellowing from the belly of the big fish. And as we consider Jonah's bellow this evening, I'd like us to draw our attention to four things from this chapter.

[2 : 58] I want us to see four things. Jonah's complication, Jonah's cry, Jonah's confession and Jonah's Christ.

Four things. Jonah's complication, Jonah's cry, Jonah's confession and Jonah's Christ. So we look first of all at Jonah's complication.

We were told in verse 1, then Jonah prayed to the Lord his God from the belly of the big fish.

Jonah's complication came to light when the Lord stopped Jonah in his tracks.

Because looking at chapter 1, when Jonah was running away from the Lord, everything seemed to be going so well for Jonah. The Lord had called Jonah to go to Nineveh, but Jonah decided to go in the opposite direction.

The Lord had called him to go and preach a message of repentance, but Jonah refused and he went towards Tarshish. And even though he went in the opposite direction, the Lord was still gracious and the Lord was still patient with Jonah.

[4 : 03] Because you know, you would have thought that the Lord would have immediately put an obstacle in Jonah's path to stop him from going to Joppa and getting on a ship towards Tarshish.

But you know, when Jonah defied the word of God, he actually misread and misused the Lord's providence. Because when you read chapter 1, we see that providence had it that Jonah made it to Joppa.

And providence had it that when Jonah put his hand into his pocket, he had the right money to board the ship that was going towards Tarshish. For Jonah, it seemed that providence was saying that it's okay to be a disobedient disciple.

But we look at the story of Jonah and we ask ourselves, well, when is it ever okay to be a disobedient disciple? When is it ever okay to disobey the word of God and live and do as we please?

And you know, what we ought to learn from Jonah is that the Lord's providence may allow us to go so far, but his patience will not.

[5 : 13] The Lord's providence may allow us to go so far, but his patience will not. Jonah had tested the Lord's providence and he had tried the Lord's patience.

But now both the Lord's providence and the Lord's patience left Jonah. Where did they leave him but bellowing from the belly of a big fish? Jonah had thought that his complication was that he had to go to Nineveh to preach the gospel.

But Jonah's complication only got bigger when the Lord brought him into the depths. And you know, let's never think that it's okay to be a disobedient disciple.

Let's never think that it's okay to disobey what the word of God is telling us and live and do as we please. Because like Jonah, when we test the Lord's providence and when we try the Lord's patience, our complications will only get bigger.

And the Lord will bring us, he'll bring us into the depths so that we realize that we've got no one else to turn to. And in many ways we'll end up like the Samsam in Psalm 130, crying from the depths, Lord from the depths to the I cried.

[6 : 25] My voice, Lord, do thou hear unto my supplications voice, given a tent of ear. But you know, when we consider Jonah's complication of being swallowed by a big fish and being in its belly for three days and three nights, looking at Jonah's complication, it defies all human logic.

Because down throughout the centuries, people have tried to explain how it was humanly possible for Jonah to be swallowed by a big fish and survive in its belly for three days and three nights.

And some have argued that Jonah, he couldn't have gone into the stomach of the big fish, because well that the stomach acid would have killed him almost immediately.

And with that, while some have then gone to the conclusion that when Jonah was swallowed by a big fish, he went down the wrong way and he ended up in the lung of the fish and not in the stomach.

Because in the lung, Jonah would have been able to breathe because there was oxygen coming in. But you know, that doesn't explain how Jonah was vomited out of the stomach of the fish.

[7 : 32] And if we say that Jonah was in the lung of the fish and not the belly, then we're denying what scripture actually says, because scripture says that he was in the belly of the fish. And you know, many people, they've tried to come up with explanations over the years as to how it was humanly possible for Jonah to be swallowed by a big fish.

And yet, you know, we forget so often that we worship the God of the impossible. Because the Bible asks us, is anything too hard for the Lord?

And Jesus reminds us on the pages of scripture, what is impossible with man is possible with God. And you know, when we try and explain the inexplicable, we're actually trying to put God into a box. We're trying to put him into our little box. We're trying to understand something that's far beyond our knowledge or even our comprehension. But my friend, we worship the God of the impossible. We worship the God who made this world out of nothing by the word of his power in the space of six days and all very good.

[8 : 42] We worship the God who created us in his own image and likeness. And the amazing thing is, if we had sang on in Psalm 130, we would have been reminded that we are fearfully and wonderfully made.

That's in Psalm 139. We worship the God tonight who flooded the world in the days of Noah. We worship the God who made barren women give birth.

We worship the God who caused fire and brimstone to fall down from heaven upon Sodom and Gomorrah. We worship the God who parted the Red Sea, who made water flow from a rock, who fed people with manna from heaven.

We worship the God who led his people by a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night for 40 years through a wilderness. We worship the God who made the sun stand still on the day of battle.

We worship the God who made the walls of Jericho fall by the sound of a trumpet. We worship the God who gave strength to Samson through his hair. We worship the God who fed the prophet Elijah by ravens.

[9 : 46] We worship the God who gave Solomon wisdom just because he asked for it. And tonight we worship the God who stopped the mouths of lions when Daniel was in the lion's den.

And that's really what happened in the Old Testament. Because when the God of the impossible, when he finally stepped onto the stage of our world, he entered by a virgin birth.

And he performed wonderful miracles by healing the sick, calming storms, forgiving sin, casting out demons and even raising the dead.

And so when it comes to Joan a bellowing from the belly of the big fish, we don't need to give a human explanation for it.

Because no human explanation can be given for a divine demonstration. We worship the God of the impossible whom Paul reminds us he is able to do in us and for us exceedingly, abundantly above all, more than we could ask or even think.

[10 : 49] And that was certainly true of Jonah. Jonah's complication was all in the hands of the God who does the impossible. But we not only see Jonah's complication, we also see secondly, Jonah's cry.

Jonah's cry because we're told in verse two, Jonah says, I called out to the Lord out of my distress and he answered me out of the belly of shell I cried and you heard my voice.

For you cast me into the deep into the heart of the seas and the floods surrounded me. All your waves and your billows passed over me.

And you know, like Sam, 130 Jonas cry from out of the depths. It was directed solely to the Lord. He is the Lord, the covenant God of his people.

And that's what's emphasized actually in verse one. We're told that Jonah prayed to the Lord, his God. Jonah prayed to his covenant making and covenant keeping God.

[11 : 49] Jonah prayed to his faithful God. And you know, whenever we see that title Lord in capital letters, we should immediately think that it refers to this to our covenant God.

He's the one who keeps covenant. He's the one who's faithful to all his promises. And that's who Jonah's praying to. He's praying to the Lord, his God. The one who keeps covenant and Jonah directs his prayer to the Lord.

Because Jonah knows that despite his disobedience and despite his unfaithfulness, the Lord will remain faithful. That's the covenant promise.

The covenant promise is that there's nothing we can do to make God love us anymore than he already does. And there's nothing we can do to make him love us any less.

He's the Lord who keeps covenant and his covenant promise is binding. Even though we faint and fail, even though we disobey and even desert the Lord, even though we break our promises and fail to uphold his covenant, the wonderful thing is he will remain faithful.

[12 : 59] He will remain constant. He will continue to uphold his covenant promises with his covenant people. And you know, that's where Jonah's hope and assurance lay.

It was in his covenant making and covenant keeping God. Because Jonah knew that even though he was plunged into the depths and darkness of despair, Jonah knew that the Lord was still there with him.

He knew that he was still able to cry out to him. And you know, my friend, let's never forget that we have the same covenant God.

He's the Lord, the one who keeps covenant and he hasn't changed. He's still faithful to his covenant promises and he's still faithful to his covenant people, despite our unfaithfulness, despite our unworthiness.

And my friend, our hope and assurance tonight is that when we're plunged into the depths and darkness of despair, whether it's because of our sin or because of sorrow or even because of sickness, our hope and assurance is that we're not left on our own.

[14 : 12] We still have access to call upon the name of the Lord. And the wonderful thing is he will answer. That's the hope and assurance that Jonah had as he prayed to the Lord.

He prays in verse two, I called out to the Lord out of my distress and he answered me out of the belly of shell. I cried and you heard my voice.

Despite his disobedience to the Lord, despite his denial of the Lord, despite even his desertion of the Lord's call upon his life, Jonah came to discover that there's no depth we can sink to and there's no distance we can run from the Lord.

And there's not even a disobedience limit with the Lord. Jonah knew that even though he got himself into such a mess, the door into the Lord's presence was never shut.

Access to the Lord was still open and repentance was always possible. You know, my friend, it was because of the Lord's covenant that Jonah could cry to the Lord.

[15:19] And that's the hope and assurance we have. And that's what we have to take from this because when we fall into sin or when we experience sorrow or when we're faced with sickness, there are times that we can turn away from the Lord.

There are times even when in these situations of sin, sorrow or sickness, we can actually distance ourselves from the Lord. Sometimes we feel shame because of our sin.

Sometimes we experience sadness because of our sorrow and even selfishness because of our sickness and we distance ourselves from the Lord. But even when we're in the depths and darkness of despair, you know, the only one who can actually understand what we're going through is the Lord.

And the only one who promises to be with us in these situations is the Lord because he knows us. He made us. He's with us wherever we go.

That's what we're singing in Samandran 39. I said, I haven't load out there there if in hell I lie. That's what David was saying. He knew that the Lord's presence was with him wherever he went.

[16:33] And that's what Jonah is saying here. He's saying that he's there with him even in the depths below. That's what he says in verse two out of the belly of Sheol.

I cried and you heard my voice. Now, Sheol, we see it often mentioned in the Psalms. Sheol is the grave.

It's the place of the dead. And that's where Jonah felt he was. He felt he was in the depths and darkness of the grave. But the wonderful thing is that even there he had the hope and assurance that the Lord was with him and the Lord was hearing his cry.

And it was because of Jonah's complication of being in the belly of the fish and even Jonah's cry that there came from Jonah a confession.

And that's what I want us to see thirdly. Jonah's confession. Jonah's complication, Jonah's cry. And then thirdly, Jonah's confession. We see in verse four, Jonah says, then I said, I am driven away from your sight, yet I shall again look upon your holy temple.

[17:45] The waters closed over me to take my life. The deep surrounded me. Weeds were wrapped about my head. At the roots of the mountains I went down to the land whose barge closed upon me forever.

Yet you brought up my life from the pit, O Lord my God. When my life was fainting away, I remembered the Lord and my prayer came to you in your holy temple. Those who pay regard to vain idols forsake their hope of steadfast love.

That I with the voice of thanksgiving will sacrifice to you. What I have vowed I will pay salvation belongs to the Lord.

You know, we mentioned earlier that if Jonah had written one of the Psalms or if Jonah had a Psalm attributed to him, or even if Jonah had told us his favorite Psalm, I would always think that it would be Psalm 130.

But as you can actually see from these verses here, Jonah's language is very poetic. His language is very poetic, just like the Psalms are.

[18:49] In fact, it was the late John L. McKay, Professor John L. McKay. He highlights in his commentary on the book of Jonah. He says that Jonah's poetic references are actually all references from the Psalms.

I didn't look up all these references, but maybe you can work out with what Psalms are from. But as you know, all the Psalms are prayer, or many of the Psalms are prayer.

And as Calvin reminds us, the Psalms give to us the anatomy of all parts of the soul. You know, I love what John L. says about Jonah's prayer. He says, rather than being an artificial composition from various sources, he says, Jonah's prayer is the natural utterance of someone well versed in scripture.

Jonah's prayer is the natural utterance of someone well versed in scripture. I arrived at that John L. McKay made that comment about Jonah, and he made that comment from his own experience. Because having had the privilege of being taught Old Testament and Hebrew by John L. McKay in the Free Church College, there's one thing I'll never forget about his classes.

[20 : 07] And that was his prayers. Because like Jonah, his prayers, as he says himself, they were the natural utterance of someone well versed in scripture.

His prayer, John L's prayer before the morning lecture, you know, it was enough to go home with. He would come in with his folder. He would place his folder on the lectern, put his pen down, and he would just close his eyes and pray.

And in fact, there was one morning when he prayed, and it's as if he took you to the third heaven in his prayer. But after he prayed, I just had to, I just sort of came out of my mouth, and I had to ask him, how did you learn to pray like that?

And John L. he put his pen down, and he explained to us that morning that he would spend every morning, each morning reading one of the questions in a larger catechism.

And that would give him direction and insight into praying according to scripture. And, you know, we'll do well to learn from such experience, to learn to pray with scripture, to pray according to scripture.

[21 : 16] We'll do well as someone who is well versed and saturated in scripture. But you're not worrying, which we must always be conscious of, is that even though Jonah could pray with scriptural prayers, like he did here, what we know about Jonah's life is that he didn't practice what he prayed.

He didn't practice what he prayed, even though Jonah knew the word of God, and he could quote the word of God, he could even pray the word of God. We look at Jonah's life and we think, well, he wasn't living according to the word of God.

And, you know, we can be the same. I can be the same. We can know the Bible, we can quote the Bible, we can pray the Bible and yet not live according to the Bible. And that's one thing that must characterise the Lord's people.

We must live according to the Bible. You know, my friend, even though Jonah is an encouragement for us to pray scripturally, he's also a warning for us to live spiritually.

He's an encouragement to pray scripturally, but he's also a warning to live spiritually. We must practice what we pray.

[22 : 30] We must practice what we pray. And that's what Jonah came to discover in the depths of the sea, because Jonah's confession, which is at the end of his prayer, he says in the end of verse nine, salvation belongs to the Lord.

And you know, it's almost a cry. You can hear it. Where Jonah has come to the realization salvation belongs to the Lord. And it's as soon as Jonah makes that confession, the big fish vomits him out onto dry land.

But you know, the thing is, Jonah had denied that salvation belonged to the Lord. For long enough, Jonah had thought that the people of Nineveh were unworthy of salvation.

For long enough, Jonah thought that the people of Nineveh didn't deserve the Lord's salvation. But even when he was in the boat with these ungodly sailors, we saw that they were converted.

And Jonah was brought to Bello in the belly of the big fish. And what came out of that experience in the depths was a Jonah cries that salvation belongs to the Lord.

[23 : 41] And you know, it was in the depth that Jonah came to discover that salvation, it's not up to him. It's not his choice. It's not his doing. It's not even his plan. It all belongs from beginning to end.

It belongs to the Lord. Salvation belongs to the Lord. And Jonah's confession shows us that he was brought into the depths in order to be taught.

Jonah was brought into the depths in order to be taught. And you know, that's often where the Christians classroom is to be found, isn't it? The Christians classroom is often not on the mountain top.

It's often to be found in the valley because it's in the depths of the valley that were tested and taught. It's in the depths of the valley that were shaped and moulded as the Lord's people.

And it's in the depths of the valley that were even made like Jonah to see that salvation belongs to the Lord. But you know, it's Jonah's experience of bellowing in the belly of the big fish that by

looking at his experience, we're enabled to see Jonah's Christ.

[24 : 54] I just want to want us to consider lastly and just just briefly. Jonah's Christ, Jonah's complication, Jonah's cry, Jonah's confession and lastly, Jonah's Christ.

Verse 10, the Lord spoke to the fish and it vomited Jonah upon the dry land.

Jonah's Christ, you know, as soon as Jonah made the confession that salvation belongs to the Lord, the big fish vomits Jonah out. But as we said before, the story of Jonah isn't just about a man who ran away from God and was swallowed by a big fish.

Jonah is presented to us in Scripture as a type of Christ. And the book of Jonah as a whole should make us see the preciousness of the Gospel.

Because the story of Jonah, it's actually about Jesus and it's about the message of the Gospel. But there's one comparison between Jonah and Jesus that fascinates me.

[26 : 01] And what fascinates me is the direction that they both went. Because in chapter one, if you remember, in chapter one we're told that Jonah went down to Joppa.

And when he had boarded the ship, he went down into the hold. And when the sailors came to throw out some cargo and throw it overboard, Jonah went down and that was found to be down in the inner part of the ship.

So Jonah's movement was down, down, down until he was down, right down in the belly of the fish. Jonah's movement was down, down, down.

That was the same movement as Jesus. Because Jesus's movement was down, down, down from the crown of glory to the cradle in Bethlehem, to the cross of Calvary.

Jesus's movement was down, down, down from the crown to the cradle to the cross, from glory to Golgotha to the grave.

[27 : 00] Jesus went down, down, down. But what's amazing is that the story didn't end there, just like with Jonah.

Jesus even compared his death and burial to that of Jonah. Jesus says in the Gospel, he says, for just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.

And so it was after three days and three nights that Jonah was delivered from the belly of Sheol, which as we said earlier, Sheol is the grave.

It's the place of the dead. So you could say that Jonah, when he was vomited out onto dry land, Jonah was resurrected from the grave. Jonah was brought from death to life.

Jonah was brought up, up, up. And you know what's happened with the greater than Jonah, Jesus Christ. Jesus went down, down, down into the depths from glory to Golgotha to the grave.

[28 : 08] But in that first Lord's day morning, Jesus was brought up, up, up. Before Jesus was resurrected from the grave, he was brought from death to life.

And as Paul reminds us in Philippians chapter two, God has highly exalted him. And he's given to him a name that is above every name.

So that at the name of Jesus, every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that he is that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God, the Father.

Our Jesus is just like our Jonah. He went down, down, down into the depths. But he was resurrected up, up, up.

You know, although Jonah was a disobedient disciple, he was a type of Christ. The story of Jonah, it's all about Jesus and the gospel.

[29 : 10] So we see Jonah's complication, Jonah's cry, Jonah's confession and Jonah's Christ. It's a wonderful story, the book of Jonah.

May the Lord bless these few thoughts to us. Let us. Oh Lord, our gracious God, we give thanks to thee for thy word.

We bless the Lord that it is the only rule to direct us on how we make glorify God and enjoy him forever. And Lord, we thank thee that we're able to learn from the experience of Jonah, to learn Lord that we are taught when we're in the depths and that even when we are in the depths, that the Lord want to is still with us, a God who promises never to leave us and never to forsake us.

And we thank the Lord even for the reminder that our Jesus, he experienced the depths, that he went to the depths of the grave and experienced the powers of hell and death so that we would be brought up, that we would experience the power of the resurrection, that we would come to know this wonderful Savior who brings life and immortality to light through the gospel.

And Lord bless thy truth to us, then we pray, strengthen us through it and that Lord as thy people that we would keep on keeping on, ever looking to Jesus, the author and the finisher of our faith. [30 : 36] Bless us then Lord we ask, remember those of the congregation this evening, those who are struggling, especially Lord those who are mourning, those whose hearts are broken, whose lives are shattered, whose world has been turned upside down, that our Lord would grant to them grace that is sufficient and that our Lord would bring comfort to their broken hearts.

Lord remember us then we pray, bless us in our being together, bless us in our parting one from another, that our Lord keep us on the way, go before us for Jesus' sake.
Amen.