

David Macleod: Jonah 2

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Preacher: Guest Preacher

[0 : 00] In the course of this year, we're not long into this year, we're only in the third month, but in the course of this year and over the last six or eight weeks, I've had more occasion to spend time in hospital with various of the girls being out than I ever have done in my life before.

I think I spent more time sleeping in hospital chairs than I did in my own bed for the month of February and hospitals are the kind of places that most of us would rather not be in, but when we have occasion to be there, we're thankful for them, we're thankful for the treatment that we receive, we're thankful for all that is done for those that we love or for ourselves of its us that are in there. And as we come to this chapter and as we get an insight into the belly of the fish and an insight into the mind and the heart of Jonah, John Calvin compares the belly of the great fish to that of a spiritual hospital.

In chapter one, for those who weren't here this morning, we considered how the word of the Lord came to Jonah in great power and great clarity.

And we also saw that when Jonah heard that word, when he was made aware that God was speaking to him through that word, he didn't obey and receive that word, but he turned away from the word of the Lord to him and he turned away from the presence of the Lord.

[1 : 49] He sought to flee from the Lord's presence as we considered and spiritually speaking, Jonah was sick. And the more that he turns away from God, the further he plunges into that spiritual sickness.

God says to Jonah, very clearly and very simply, go to Nineveh. Jonah says no. And he heads then on this downward course, down to Joppa, down into a boat, heading for Tarshish, down below deck, storm blows up.

Jonah's over the side, he's down into the ocean, he's down into the belly of the great fish that God provided.

And it's when he was all the way down there in the belly of this great fish that things begin to change. From chapter 1 verse 17 into chapter 2, we see a change in the heart of Jonah.

And this is, as Calvin makes the point, this is the spiritual recovery room for Jonah. This is the place that, and quite sure, had he had choice in this, he wouldn't want to be in.

[3 : 14] I'm sure as he was in the belly of this great fish, he didn't enjoy being there. But it was a place that he needed to be, and it was a place that in due course, one would think he would be thankful for, because from this point onwards, we see spiritual recovery.

We see spiritual awakening, spiritual revival, spiritual life. And this evening, as we make an approach to the Lord's table, that's what we're looking for in our hearts, in our lives.

We thought about this text this morning, and we're reminded again this evening from 1 Corinthians 11 and verse 28, it says, they are let a person examine himself.

So as we again come in examination and in preparation, we look for these marks, we look for these pulses, we look for these evidences of spiritual life.

And what we see and what we hear from the repenting Jonah of chapter 2, we should be able to see and hear in our own hearts, in our own lives.

[4 : 37] The evidences that we note in Jonah's testimony in chapter 2 are evidences that should be in our own lives if we are those who are preparing to come to the Lord's table.

Four points again this evening, that we note in the progression of these verses, there's a cry that comes from Jonah.

And then there's a clarity that is given to Jonah in the depths as he cries. And thirdly, we hear a confession that comes from Jonah's lips.

And finally, there is that consecration that Jonah offers to the Lord in our response. And so that's the structure. These is the course that hopefully will take this evening and the time that we have. So first of all, in Jonah's testimony, in Jonah's experience, there is this cry. Now we just sang a few moments ago from Psalm 130.

[5 : 40] And in Psalm 130 and at verse 1, it says, Lord from the depths to thee I cried.

And I can never think of that Psalm without thinking of Jonah. But he from the depths and spiritually from the depths, Jonah cries.

He cries out to God. And you know what's striking from chapter 1 is the absence of a cry from Jonah.

In chapter 1, despite the downward plunge that he is on, as he plunges into sin, a circumstance has become more and more turbulent and more and more traumatic, the one thing that Jonah will not do is he will not pray.

He will not cry out to God. Even when the ship has been thrown about in the ocean. Even when verse 5, we see that the mariners were afraid for their very lives.

[6 : 52] They are those who are crying out to their own gods. But Jonah is sleeping. And he's not sleeping because he has a conscience that is at ease.

He's sleeping because he has a conscience that is numbed. Because he had turned away from the Word of God. That's what happens when we turn away from the Word of God.

Their conscience has become dull. And we find that we can sleepwalk into the most horrendous situations. The mariners who are pagans are crying out to the God that they don't know.

And yet Jonah, God's man, God's prophet, he's sleeping. He will not of his own volition pray, and even when the pagans get ahold of him in verse 6, and they harangue him, and they shake him, and they say, I rise and call out to your God.

Jonah won't. There's that silence. The storm worsens. And Jonah is thrown overboard.

[8 : 11] And still, as he goes over the side, we hear nothing of prayer. There is no cry. And it's not until eventually he finds himself lodged in the belly of this fish that he cries out in prayer.

From the depths, from that place of abject hopelessness, Jonah cries out to the Lord. From inside the fish, Jonah prayed to the Lord as God, verse 1, saying, I called out to the Lord out of my distress, and he answered me, out of the belly of Sheol, I cried, and you heard my voice, for you cast me into the deep, into the heart of the seas, and the floods surrounding me, all your waves and your billows passed over me, and so on, Jonah's cry goes.

But note that the moment that Jonah cries out to God, things begin to change.

And the spiritual sickness that is infected his soul begins to be treated. And as we step through the verses, we can see that there is a recovery that is evident as he cries out in prayer to God.

Jonah cries, he prays. Can I ask the question in that location?

[9 : 57] I ask it first on myself, because I have to live with this sermon for much longer than you do, but I ask it also of you. How is your prayer life?

An absence of prayer, or a famine of prayer, or a reluctance to come to the closet or to the corporate place of prayer?

It indicates so sickness. But as we turn to God in prayer, as we cry out to him, sometimes from the depths of our lives, a depth of sin that maybe veiled from everyone else, but we know in our own hearts, as we break the silence, as we determine in our wills, I will cry out, sometimes from the most desperate of situations the Lord hears.

And he listens to our cry. And that's when recovery and that's when revival begins. And every testimony, every believer who is in this room this evening, everyone who has been sailed, everyone who has been converted, everyone who has been born again into new life in Christ, it begins with a cry to God.

A cry for mercy. It begins with a cry that God will look upon us and give us His grace.

[11 : 45] It begins with a cry for salvation as we see our sin, as we see our Savior. It's not enough just to see.

We have to cry out and ask that God will help us. It's what Jonah did.

He cried out in prayer to God. And every revival account, this is the biggest revival in Jonah chapter 3 in all of biblical history, a whole city, over a million people, they turn from evil, they turn from sin, they turn to God.

Every revival account that we read, even in our own relatively recent times. What does it begin with?

It's not methodology, it's not slick evangelism. Every revival account can be traced back to a cry out in prayer.

[12:57] Then after time, as we look through revival stories, we find little groups of women and men who are crying out from their hearts to God in prayer, as Jonah did.

So first of all, there's the cry. And secondly, we see here there is a clarity that Jonah is given. Now it's helpful, I think, just to try and get inside the mind and the circumstances of Jonah.

Remember, this is not mythology, this is history. This is something that happened. This is a real character who went through this real situation.

Can you imagine what was going through Jonah's mind in all of this situation as it's unfolding? Can you imagine how disorientated he must have felt in the circumstances that we've read from chapter one into chapter two?

If you ever fall asleep during the day, I know that's what you think ministers do every day. We have a wee snooze midday, but we don't really. But if you fall asleep during the day and you have a 10 minute cat nap and somebody comes in, they wake you up.

[14:14] You wake up and you're so alarmed and disorientated, you don't know who you are, where you are, what time it is, what day it is, what happens next, such as the confusion and the disorientation.

What about Jonah? Try to think about that for a moment. One moment he is in that deep sleep below decked. The next he's in the water.

The next he's in the belly of this great fish. One would expect Jonah, as we find him in the belly of this great fish, to be in a state of confusion, wondering if he's going to ever wake up from this nightmare.

But actually the opposite is true. Jonah is given a crystal clarity from inside the belly of this great fish.

Not only does Jonah now understand where he is, he understands why he's there. And he understands who's put him there.

[15:14] Now if the local newspaper were to report on the story of Jonah and all this amazing things that would have happened, they would have reported that the fishing man threw him overboard, there was some kind of conversation.

Jonah goes over the side and it just so happened that a great fish was swimming along at the right moment and Jonah's in the belly. These are the facts, but Jonah has a clarity that enables him to see more than the facts.

Jonah understands all that is behind us. Look at verse 3. Jonah says, For you cast me into the deep, into the heart of the seas, and the flood surrounded me, and your waves and your bills passed over me.

So from the belly of the great fish, Jonah has this understanding and this conviction that God is sovereign. Jonah understands in all the turbulence of these circumstances that God is in control and God is teaching him.

God is redirecting him through all of this. And it's as if in the belly of the great fish, eventually the penny drops and the scales fall from Jonah's eyes and he sees his sin and the consequences of his sin.

[16:49] And you know, it's always painful when God shows us our sin, especially for the first time, but it's necessary.

We need to have that clarity. It's the work of the Holy Spirit. Remember when Jesus spoke of the Holy Spirit who would come, he spoke of how when he came, he would convict the world, he would show the world our sin.

And as we are given that clarity to see our sin, it's another mark that we look for. It's a mark, an indication of spiritual awakening, spiritual revival of spiritual life.

If we don't see our sin, if we don't see the gravity of the situation that we are in as those who are sinners and lost and doomed and hopeless before God, if we don't have the clarity and we don't see that, then we don't see our need to be saved.

We don't see our need to be revived. If we don't see our sin, we don't see how precious the body that was broken and the blood that was shed is.

[18 : 23] We don't see our sin. We don't look to, we don't look for our Savior. But when we have that clarity that God alone gives and we see our sin, yes, it is painful.

It is humbling. It is humiliating. But it's also encouraging because the pain that we experience at the revelation of sin, it's a so healing pain.

That's a pain that even in the medical sense we can deal with. Sometimes there is a pain that comes from the body being healed.

And we know we're struggling. We know there is a pain in the physiotherapy, but we deal with it because we know it's a healing pain. And when we see our sin and when we experience the pain of that revelation, it's a so healing pain because God is at work.

If you are here this evening and you are under conviction of sin, praise the Lord for that. God is at work.

[19 : 45] He is the one that gives us that clarity. He is the one that gives us that revelation. He is the one who is at work.

He is the one who shows us our sin in order that he will lead us to our Savior.

John Newton, who wrote to him amazing grace, who was a seaman and a notorious blasphemer and who came to faith in Christ towards the end of John Newton's life.

His mind and his memory were going. And there's an account told of someone who visited him and he was in a state of confusion in much of the conversation.

But his testimony at the end of his life was this. He says this, although my memory is fading, I remember two things very clearly.

[20 : 51] One, I am a great sinner and two, Christ is a great Savior. And that's the clarity of the Christian.

That's the clarity that we need to have if we are going to sit at the Lord's table. Let a man examine himself.

As we examine ourselves, as God examines us through the prism of his word, we need to see this, that we are sinners.

And that Christ is Savior and not just the Savior, but he is our Savior. He is the one that we have cried out to for mercy and forgiveness and for grace.

So there's that cry and there's that confession. There is that cry and there's that clarity. And thirdly, there is this confession. Now what is confession?

[22 : 00] I don't think I need to tell you what confession is, but very simply, we know that confession is when we agree with the Lord that we are guilty.

It's one of these things that is not hard to understand, but it can be very hard to actually do.

Confession is when we get on our knees before God and agree that we are exposed. Confession is when we agree with the Lord that we are guilty.

Confession is when we admit that we have been wrong. Confession is when we stop making excuses and we stop trying to justify our actions. We stop arguing with God.

We stop hiding from God and we come clean. We put our hands up and we admit our guilt. We admit our disobedience.

[22 : 57] I mentioned in passing this morning of the prodigal son. Remember in Luke 15, the prodigal son, like Jonah, as he fled from his father's presence, he sank into the ruinous depths of sin.

Like Jonah, he's given clarity in the pigsty. He comes to his senses and when he does, he determines that he will go to his father and he will say what?

He determines that he will go to his father and he will say, I have sinned. The prodigal in the pigsty realizes the tragedy of the distance between him and his father and he determines he will confess his sin and he will seek to return to his father.

And that's what we hear from Jonah. We hear confession. Verse 4, Jonah said, then I said, I am driven away from your sight.

Another translation says, I have been banished from your sight. Yet I will look again toward your holy temple. The engulfing water threatened me, the deep surrounded me.

[24 : 23] Seaweed was wrapped around my head. To the roots of the mountains I sank down. The earth beneath me barred me in forever.

But you, O Lord, my God, brought my life up from the pit. When my life was ebbing away, I remembered you, Lord, and my prayer rose to you, to your holy temple.

And this is a picture. It's a prayer that we are enabled to hear that teaches us how to confess our sin.

This is an illustration of what it looks like and what it sounds like to confess our sin and to repent, to change direction.

And that too is something that each of us need to do before we can become Christians. We need to confess our sin.

[25 : 39] Not argue with God, not try to justify ourselves through our own good works, our own church attendance, our own whatever.

We need to confess our sin, put our hands up and say, Lord, I'm guilty.

Something that we need to do before God will receive us and forgive us and cleanse us. But you know, it's something that we each need to do long after we've become Christians too.

Day by day we are to confess our sin and repent and turn and turn and turn and turn away from our sin and to our Savior.

Martin Luther said, when our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, repent, he intended that the entire life of believers should be repentance.

[26 : 53] Their commentator, Mathis, David Mathis said, all of the Christian life is repentance.

Reconciliation is to be the Christian's continual posture.

See God will never put you and I at ease in our sin. He will never accept us in our sin, but he warns us as he warn Jonah of the danger of persisting in sin.

Let's not ignore that warning. How many of them are there in scripture? Here's one. Trans chapters 6 and verse 23, for the wages of sin is death.

But the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. And we can be assured tonight of that eternal life.

We can be assured that we will escape the second death, that we will escape judgment, that we will escape hell. If we confess our sin and we look in faith to Jesus.

[28 : 07] One John 1 9, wonderful words. If we confess our sins, he is faithful Jesus.

And just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. And so we find here that Jonah confesses and Jonah finds forgiveness.

And now as he's in this new recovered state, no longer is he turning away from the word of God. But he is turning to the word of God.

An interesting exercise to do when you get home, there's no time to do it just now, is read through this prayer and cross reference it with scripture. It's hardly an original word in Jonah's prayer.

It's saturated with the psalms. Jonah in the depths of the belly of the fish, God's word, he's turning to the word that he has memorized, the word that he has cherished, the word that he has spoken.

[29 : 16] He's turning to that word and he's bringing that word to God in prayer. Chapter one, he's turning away from the word.

Chapter two, he's turning to the word. Chapter one, he's fleeing from the presence of God.

Chapter two, he's seeking the presence of God. Chapter four, Jonah says, I am driven away from your sight, yet I shall again look upon your holy temple under the old covenant.

That's where one could meet with God. That's where one could enter into the Lord's presence under the new covenant that we give thanks for and we remember as we come to the Lord's table.

We need not look to the temple. We need not look to the holy land, we look to Jesus. He is the temple.

[30 : 24] And so in his name and through his saving work at Calvary, we are able to draw near to God.

And that's how we come. If you intend to come to the Lord's table tomorrow looking at yourself, you have no place.

If you intend to come to the Lord's table looking at others, there is no place. We come to the Lord's table looking only to Jesus, fixing our eyes upon Jesus, remembering all that he has done for us.

As he went to that cross. We come to the Lord's table confessing our sin and putting our whole faith in him.

A much quoted poem is that poem, I am a Christian. It says there when I say I am a Christian, I don't speak of this with pride.

[31 : 39] I'm confessing that I stumble and need Christ to be my guide. When I say I am a Christian, I'm not trying to be strong.

I'm professing that I'm weak and need his strength to carry on. And that's the profession that we make as we come to the Lord's table.

Finally and briefly, there is that consecration. It's a hymn that is often sung, has these words in it, take my life and let it be.

Consecrated Lord to thee. And that was a song, that was a hymn that Jonah could not sing. He would not sing in chapter one, but now he can sing it.

In chapter one, Jonah is shouting with Sinatra, I'll do it my way. Chapter two, Jonah has come to realise painfully, has to be God's way.

[33 : 01] In chapter one, we hear nothing, not one single note of praise from Jonah's lips. In chapter two, from the unlikely sanctuary of the belly of a whale, or a great fish.

Jonah verse nine shouts grateful praise. We hear a voice of thanksgiving. We hear that proclamation, that salvation belongs to the Lord.

In chapter one, he couldn't care one jot about the people of Nineveh, he was not going there. End of story.

In chapter two, there is something of a concern for those who are turning away from God's love for them. He seems ready to go now and proclaim to them salvation belongs to the Lord.

And not that this is in my notes, but that's our proclamation for tomorrow, isn't it? That's what we proclaim as we come to the table.

[34 : 16] Salvation belongs to the Lord. So all of him, none of us, salvation belongs to the Lord.

He is the one who has done it all. He is the one who has paid the price. He is the one who cried out from the cross, it is finished.

And all we are called to do is accept it. And then profess that we have accepted this salvation which belongs to the Lord.

What happened next, verse 10? The Lord spoke to the fish and it vomited Jonah out upon the dry land.

And so we see this turnaround in two chapters, from spiritual sickness to spiritual health, from backsliding, depressing on in obedience, from spiritual ruin to revival.

[35 : 25] A revival that was going on in his heart, revival in him, and a revival that was to come to Nineveh through him.

And it was prayed. And the words of the hymn come to mind, O Holy Ghost, revival comes from thee.

And the revival, start the work in me. Thy word declares, thou wilt supply our need for blessing thy will, Lord.

I humbly plead. And it's with that prayer, it's with that cry, it's with that desire that we come to the table crying to the Lord, our Savior.

With the clarity that we are sinners who need His grace, confessing our sin and consecrating ourselves afresh to Him as our Lord.

[36 : 34] That's how we come. And how heartless he was, pray.