

David Macleod: Jonah 1

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Preacher: Guest Preacher

[0 : 00] Well, if you could turn with me back to Jonah chapter 1 please.

And I think that this is what will be over the course of the next two days in preparation. This is where the Lord seems to have settled me in this little book of Jonah.

So that will be the passage that we look at this morning, chapter 1 in particular. I'm conscious that this is a service where we're in preparation for coming to the Lord's table tomorrow, God willing.

And one text that's never far from my mind and I expect it's in the minds of most people as we prepare to come to the Lord's table is that verse from 1 Corinthians 11 and verse 28.

It says, they are let a person examine himself then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. And so this is the first of two services in the course of this day where we're in preparation and we're in examination of ourselves as we come in approach to the Lord's table.

[1 : 22] We think of the words of the psalmist in Psalm 139. I think we'll sing them at some point in the weekend. The psalmist says, search me, O God, and know me.

Verse Corinthians 11, 28, let a person examine himself then. And noticing both these texts, we're called to examine not anyone else, but ourselves.

We ask that God will reveal to us in some measure the measure that we can bear, our own hearts, and that by his spirit he will work in us that we will see what he wants to do in us.

And so a couple of questions just to ponder as we come in preparation. The first question is simply this, where are we in our walk with God today?

The question before that is, do we know God? In the first instance, have we come in repentance and in faith to Jesus Christ?

[2 : 47] Because that's the profession that we will make if we come to the Lord's table. We profess that we are sinners who are repenting.

We profess that we are sinners whose faith is not in ourselves, but our faith is in Jesus.

So have we looked in repentance and faith to him yet? Now it may be in my expectation on a Saturday morning service is that most people here will have looked in faith to Christ.

Most here will have repented. Some have likely been on the road for many years. And if that's the case, if you're a Christian and you've been a Christian for many years, let me ask the question on myself as I ask it of you.

Are you still walking close with God? Because as one hymn writer put it, we are prone to wonder.

[3 : 54] Are we enjoying communion with God day by day? Do we have that abiding sense of his presence? Is there that intimacy that we enjoy? Are we pressing on with the Lord as he leads us?

Or is there anyone here who's falling back at this time? The Book of Jonah is a book that enables us to think through and grapple with these questions.

It's a book that with the help of the Holy Spirit enables us to diagnose and see where we are spiritually. It helps us in our self-examination.

It enables us to see our spiritual condition at present. And in my notes, I've underlined that word at present. And it's important that we see that.

And I'll explain why as we consider, first of all, Jonah's past. First point, four points today. And the first point is Jonah's past blessings.

[5 : 06] The second point is Jonah's present backsliding. The third point is Jonah's plunge into sin. And the final point is Jonah's patient God.

So that's the roadmap for the next 20 minutes or so. But first of all, I'd like to think about Jonah's past blessings. Now, in the islands, we tend to know a lot about each other.

I am from Lewis. I was born in Stornoway. And what I've discovered in returning to Harris is that much of the conversations that I have both in Harris and in Lewis, they begin at, who are your people?

Tell me about your people. You're from Lewis. You were born in Stornoway. Well, tell me about your people. And I'm off talking about Stornoway and Donnie Painter. And I'm off talking about Ness and my granny.

And what was her nickname? And what about your Shenner? And so the questions come. And the conversation goes that way, and it's all about getting the people clear, not until the people seem to be cleared as the conversation ever progress.

[6 : 12] Now, as we think about Jonah, and I've asked Jonah about his past and his people, it would be a short conversation. We know very little about Jonah in terms of his people.

Who was he? We're told here in verse one that he is Jonah the son of Amethai. There's only one other place in the Old Testament that we read about Jonah the son of Amethai.

It's 2 Kings chapter 14. Maybe we should just go there for a moment. It'll keep us all awake. 2 Kings chapter 14.

We're given very little, but we're given just a short window into the life of Jonah. As in 2 Kings 14 and verse 23, in the 15th year of Amaziah, the son of Joash, king of Judah, Jeroboam, the son of Joash, king of Israel, began to reign in Samaria.

And he reigned for 41 years. And he did what was evil in the sight of the Lord. He did not depart from all the sins of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, which he made Israel to sin.

[7 : 38] He restored the border of Israel from Lebo-Hammathas far as the sea of the Arab, according to the word of the Lord, the God of Israel, which he spoke by his servant Jonah, son of Amethai, the prophet, who was from Gath Heifer.

And that's it. It's only our place that we'll find Jonah in the Old Testament. It's just a short historical note.

But from that short historical note, there's three things that we can see about Jonah's past and how blessed it was. The first thing that we see here is that Jonah was a prophet.

And that meant that Jonah was one who had a sense of, and he knew in a special way, the presence of God. Jonah was one who was in the privileged position of God himself being able to give Jonah insight.

Jonah enjoyed an intimacy with God that ordinary believers under the Old Covenant did not have. And so Jonah in his walk with God as a prophet, he knew great blessing.

[8 : 56] So we know that he was blessed in his prophetic status. The second thing we see about Jonah is that Jonah was living at a time of blessing.

And we're not going to go into this, but we know from the dating of the book that Jonah's contemporaries were Elijah and Elisha. And in the days of Elijah and Elisha, God was doing a new thing.

God was moving in a mighty way amongst his people. God was moving in reviving power. And Jonah was there.

And he experienced something of the blessing of living in that day. And the third thing we see about Jonah in terms of his past was Jonah had been faithful in service.

Jonah as a prophet, he was known to be God's servant. And he was known to be one that God spoke through.

[9 : 55] And he was one who was listened to and recognized as God's man. So he had a ministry and that ministry was blessed.

That ministry was fruitful. So thinking about that altogether, Jonah had a blessed past. And yet all these spiritual blessings of the past were not enough to sustain him in the present.

And that's a challenge to us as we examine ourselves. Because what was true for Jonah is equally true for us.

No matter how much we may have known God's blessing in days gone by, no matter how blessed our past may be, no matter how blessed our spiritual heritage is, no matter how close we once back then walked with God, no matter how much God may have used us, even in the service in bringing people who are out of Christ into that knowledge of Christ through perhaps a testimony or an address given, no matter how blessed our past was, we cannot expect past blessings to be a spiritual preservative for the present.

Remember the children of Israel was reading about them in my devotional readings. As they journeyed through the wilderness on route to the promised land, God provided manna for their needs.

[11 : 39] How often did he provide it? Every day. There were no manna warehouses that were stocked up with manna from the past that they could delve into.

Anything that was retained from the past actually rotted in terms of the manna. But it's a picture for us that we're to learn from in our journey through time.

We have no continuing city here. But as we journey through the days that God gives us, God promises that he will give us what we need in terms of our walk with him each day as we come to him.

Remember what Jesus taught us to pray, give us each day, this day, our daily bread.

So we can't expect to live off and grow strong through yesterday's bread. We need every day, every hour to come to Jesus.

[12 : 55] We need from him each day, each hour, in the present tense always, we need that grace that is sufficient.

We need that strength that is made perfect in our weakness. We need him every hour. We need to know that as individual Christians.

And then in terms of our fellowships as well, we think about not just the personal but the corporate. As God's people, across various fellowships, across these islands and years gone by, there has been such rich blessings.

And we praise the Lord for them and we are thankful for them. Some here may even have tasted something of revival in these years gone by.

Some may have been used in mighty ways as they share testimony to bring souls to Christ. And let's praise the Lord for that blessed past.

[14 : 02] If we have experienced such things in days gone by, let's praise the Lord for all that he has been gracious in showing us. But we don't depend on that in the present.

Jonah had all these blessings of the past, but yet as Jonah comes under scrutiny in these verses as we examine him, we find him in the present tense in a poor spiritual state.

And so as we examine ourselves, me first, we don't look to the past, we look at our present walk with God or maybe our lack of it.

The second point that we see here is Jonah's present backsliding. And Jonah was in a state of backsliding as we find him here.

How do we know Jonah was backsliding? And as we look at him, how do we know if we are backsliding? What are the marks of decay that are to cause alarm in us if we see them as we examine ourselves?

[15 : 18] Well, there's two marks that I want to highlight in this point. There's a turning away from the Word of God and there's a turning away from the presence of God. And we see that in these first three verses.

It says, now, the word of the Lord came to Jonah, son of Amethai. Go to the great city of Nineveh, that great city and call out against it, for the evil has come up before me.

But Jonah rose to flee from Tarshish, from the presence of the Lord. He went down to Joppa and found a ship going to Tarshish. So he paid the fare and went on board to go with him to Tarshish, away from the presence of the Lord.

The word of the Lord came to Jonah. The word of the Lord came in great power and clarity to Jonah in that experience.

And the Lord of the Word came to him in that encounter. A clear message is given. Go to Nineveh and preach.

[16 : 31] Nothing to grapple with there that's hard to understand is that it's just crystal clear. But what does Jonah do? Well, Jonah disobeyed.

He turns away from the word of the Lord, clear and emphatic as it is, and he turns away from the presence. He flees from the presence of God. And that's our experience when we turn away from God's word as he presses it on our lives, in different areas in our walk with him.

When we are in that disobedient state, we can no longer be at ease in his presence. That's what we see in Jonah. God speaks to him.

He closes his ears and then he has to flee. Turning away from the word of God and turning away from the presence of God.

These are the marks of spiritual backsliding. These are the things that are to cause alarm bells to ring within us if we see that within us.

[17 : 42] It's not a fact that the parts of the Bible that we struggle most with are not the parts that we find so hard to understand.

The parts of the Bible that we struggle most with are usually the parts that are costly to obey. That's Jonah's testimony.

There's nothing hard to understand here. There's nothing confusing. But this was a costly call.

And he did not want to submit it. Jonah turns away from the word of the Lord and just see the emphasis that we have here as Jonah turns away from the presence of the Lord.

There's such persistence in verse 3 and also in verse 10. It says in verse 3, but Jonah rose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord.

[18 : 44] He went down to Joppa and found a ship going to Tarshish. So he paid the fare and went down into it to go with him to Tarshish away from the presence of the Lord.

Then in verse 10, as the mariners, the sailors are addressing Jonah, they say, what is this that you have done for the men knew that he was fleeing from the presence of the Lord because he had told them.

So that's Jonah's condition. It's a sad one when we think about the blessing of the past contrasted with the state of the present.

He's in backsliding. It's Jonah's condition. I wonder is it anybody's condition here today as we examine ourselves.

It's a miserable state to be in. Jonah shows us that I know from experience. There's nothing joyful.

[19 : 49] There's nothing contented about being in a state where we are turning away from the clear word of God and we are fleeing the presence of God.

There's no joy. There's no peace when we are backsliding. There's only leanness of soul.

There's only that spiritual unease. There's only that sense of guilt. Especially as we come and approach to the Lord's table.

There's a hymn that we sing sometimes and it goes like this. When we walk with the Lord in the light of his word what a glory he sheds on our way.

While we do his good will he abides with us still and with all who will trust and obey. Trust and obey for there's no other way to be happy in Jesus but to trust and obey.

[21 : 00] Jonah was not trusting God at this juncture. Jonah was not trusting God's plan and God's purpose and Jonah was not obeying God's word to him.

And Jonah was not obeying God's call to serve him and to walk close with him.

Are we? And these are questions that we have to grapple with. Questions that we must address as we examine ourselves and as we prepare to come to the Lord's table.

The third point that we see here is Jonah's plunge into sin. And do you notice that the moment Jonah turns away from the word of God and the moment he turns away from the presence of God he's in a downward course, he's in a downward spiral.

Even in the clarity of the words that are used in the passage, Jonah in verse 3 he goes down to Joppa. And when he gets down to Joppa he just happens to find a ship that is waiting and ready to sail taking him at high speed in the opposite direction to God's call.

[22 : 27] Now there's just a wee word of caution there. Sometimes we read too much into our circumstances don't we? Sometimes whenever we see an open door we think God must have opened it.

Jonah arrives in Joppa, he's heading away from God's call and there's an open door, there's a boat that's just ready to sail. We're not told but you just wonder if in Jonah's mind he's justifying himself by saying, well this must be God's doing.

The devil is equally able to open doors. Our faith cannot be in our circumstances, our faith must be in God's clear word to us.

And so here we see to get back to the point Jonah goes down to Joppa and when he gets to Joppa here's the boat ready to go and Jonah goes down into the boat it says.

And then once he's in the boat verse 7 he goes down below deck and then the storm whips up as we know so well and to cut a longer story short very soon we see that Jonah is down plunging into the ocean and from there he's soon going to be down in the belly of the great fish verse 17.

[23 : 45] And it's not until he's all the way down there that he turns in repentance. And this is history, this is a factual story that's reported for us.

It's also an illustration for us of the danger and the speed with which we can slide downwards into sin.

A few weeks ago now it was, I went out one morning and we live in Kailas Skaupy and we live at the top of a hill for anyone who knows the house.

The drive was virtually vertical and I went out one day I was needing to take the girls to school I was having to head through to the hospital. I looked out there was a wee dusting of snow it looked like.

I thought I'll just step out and make sure it is just a wee dusting. I got to the drive and within a second I was on my backside. Sheat ice. And then as I tried to get back up and stand and steady myself I couldn't remain stationary.

[24 : 53] I was slipping down and slipping down uncontrollably as long as I was on that drive. I was slipping I was regressing I was out of control. And that's how sin works.

It's like being on a sheer icy drive we can't remain stationary in our sin. It's a downward course.

And when we turn away from God and His word we slide and we slide and we slide and sometimes we have to slide pretty deep down before we come to our senses.

Remember David and Bathsheba. I'm sure if we had said to David in the moment that he looked upon Bathsheba this is how far you're going to fall if you don't turn away.

He would never have believed it. And yet what speed and what depravity he fell into as a consequence of remaining in that sin.

[25 : 57] Give him the prodigal son. He leaves the father. He flees his presence. He goes to the faraway land.

And remember how far he regressed. How low he was before he eventually returned to his father.

Jonah never took the time to examine himself. He didn't want to see. He didn't want God to deal with this particular sin.

But God loved Jonah. And just as a loving father disciplines his wayward child, God was intent.

His discipline would impact Jonah. And so God sends the storm that takes Jonah into repentance.

[26 : 56] And that's the final point. Jonah's patient God. Our thing to notice in the study of the character of Jonah here is that when Jonah is away from the Lord, when he's fleeing his presence, when Jonah is not right with God, he's no patience for the lost.

He's no love for the lost. We're told in chapter 4 that Nineveh was a city that had over 120,000 people who do not know their right hand from their left.

And it's thought that the commentators, they tell us that's likely to be children that have been spoken about there as God addresses Jonah. We'll get to that in due course.

The commentators tell us that Nineveh likely had over a million people and they were lost. They were far from God.

They were like sheep without a shepherd. And yes, Jonah had been blessed as one of God's people.

[28 : 13] But he does not seem to have any kind of desire as one who was blessed to become a blessing. Yes, he had been shown the light of God's presence.

He was one of those that were to be a light for the nations. And yet there seems to be no thought of that, no consideration of that.

Here we find Jonah, he is God's prophet. And yet he seems to have no interest in those who were lost in Nineveh. Why did he not want to go?

Maybe it was because of the danger, the difficulty of the mission. If we had the time and we don't, it's gone. We could go to Nahum chapter 3, you can read that later.

And we see in Nahum chapter 3 just a window into the city of Nineveh and it was violent and it was ugly and it was idolatrous.

[29 : 22] The likelihood of a prophet of God getting a good reception there in human terms is minuscule. So maybe it was the fact that Jonah thought about Nineveh and thought about the reception he would get and thought about saving his own skin and said, I'm not going there.

I think it's more likely that Jonah didn't want to go to Nineveh, not because he was worried about saving his own skin. He didn't want to go to Nineveh because he was frightened that if he went in accordance with God's call and if he spoke the word that God gave to him, they might just hear and they might just turn from their sin and they might just be saved.

And Jonah didn't like the people. He didn't want to see them saved. And Jonah was thinking about perhaps his own reputation and what would his peers say?

What would his fellow countrymen say if they hear that Jonah and his ministry is used to take their enemies from damnation into salvation?

Jonah's reputation would be in tatters. And so Jonah has no intention of going to Nineveh and that's another mark of spiritual decay.

[30 : 46] We care much more about what other people think of us. We care much more about our own comfort and our own security than we do about being obedient to God.

I don't know you as a congregation, but I wonder is there anyone here this afternoon at who is a Christian and who is following Christ, but who is following at a distance and secretly?

And perhaps the reason that you're remaining at that place is because you're more concerned about what other people will say if you take the step than what Jesus has already said to all those who are following.

What did he say? It's very clear. Do this in remembrance of me.

Each time we sit at the Lord's table, what are we doing? As we remember our Lord, we are proclaiming His death until He comes.

[32 : 14] Even what we do in the enacting of it, it's a preached out sermon. It's a visual sermon. It's a public profession of the faith that we have in Jesus.

As we take the bread, as we take the wine, we are speaking to all who are looking in about the body that was broken for us and the blood that was shed for us.

Every time we are given as an opportunity to sit at the Lord's table, it's an opportunity to speak out the gospel. It's an opportunity to profess your faith not on yourself but in Christ.

It's an opportunity to speak to others and to challenge others about where they stand with Christ, because if you're a secret believer and you go forward, everyone will soon know and that will be a challenge to them.

Where do I stand with Christ? This one's made their public profession. This one has nailed their colours to the mast. This one has said that they trust Jesus.

[33 : 48] What about me? Don't be like we were Jonah. He was more than happy to pass on this opportunity that this call that the Lord had given him to tell others about God.

Don't miss that chance. If you are the Lord's, take your place, profess your faith, tell others about the one who loved you and died for you.

Jonah had lost his love. He had lost his patience with the people of Nineveh, but Jonah's God, who is our God, the God who does not change, he hadn't.

And he was and he is a patient, gracious, compassionate, merciful, slow to anger, abounding, instead fast love God.

So in his love, in his compassion, in his mercy, in his grace, he sent a storm.

[35 : 16] He sent the great fish in order that Jonah would be restored to obedience and in order that the lost on the boat and the lost of Nineveh would hear the word of God and would be saved.

And that's what happened. And we'll explore it as we go. Jonah is restored not to perfection, but he is restored to repentance.

And Nineveh becomes the city where actually we see the greatest awakening revival that we see anywhere in all of biblical history.

And all of that is testimony not to the perfection of Jonah. He's far from it. But it's testimony to the love and the patience of God, how lovingly, how tenderly God deals with Jonah and how lovingly God still deals with us.

Because just as the Synonym of Nineveh come up before God in verse one of chapter one, still my sin and yours. It comes up before God day by day, the thoughts, the words that he'd still in his holiness, he is against us in our sinful rebellion.

[36 : 44] But still he is patient and loving. And his word still comes to us today through the less than perfect Jonah.

And it's a word that calls us to repent of sin and to be saved. And so if you're not a Christian and you're here, if you've never yet repented, the message of Jonah is a call to repent for the first time today.

Look to Jesus. Look to the one whose body was broken and whose blood was shed for you.

Look to him and be saved. If you are a Christian and you have repented, but of late you've been sliding back and your heart is cool, then as we examine ourselves, if we feel God convicting us of our waywardness, what are we to do?

Same answer. Repent afresh today. Trust and obey God.

[38 : 17] And then let us take our place at a table that is set for repenting sinners who love and trust Christ as our Savior.

Let's pray.