

Jonah's Mission (3): Jonah Sings A Song

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 20 February 2022

Preacher: Colin Dow

[0 : 00] Jonah chapter 2 verses 1 through 10. Then Jonah prayed to the Lord his God from the belly of the fish.

Jonah, please close your ears. People get married in very strange places. Don't get any ideas because I know you get married later on this year. I did an internet search on the topic of the strangest places to get married and came up with some crackers for you and Ailey. Imagine getting married underwater in an aquarium swimming with sharks. Imagine getting married on top of Mount Everest.

Not so good? No. Imagine getting married in a zero gravity space simulator. Yeah, you go for that one. Imagine getting married on a roller coaster.

Yeah? No? Okay. Remember, I'm marrying you, so I've got to be there too. Strange places to get married, right? The Bible's filled with people singing strange songs in strange places.

[1 : 07] The Apostle Paul sang a song while in prison. King David sang a song while pretending to be mad. And Jonah sang a song while in the belly of a great fish.

Strange places to sing. But then perhaps what needs to be sung is more important than where it needs to be sung. These verses are being, or this song, this prayer has been made from inside the belly of a great fish.

Now, let's clear something up. No fish known to science is capable of doing what Jonah's fish did. Don't try to find a scientific explanation for this fish. Just don't.

It is God's special creation designed by God to carry Jonah from the depths of the sea back to shore. Just like the star of Bethlehem was God's special creation designed by him to guide the wise men from the east to the stable in which Jesus lay.

Don't overthink the whale in which Jesus sang. Think through the words he prayed. And this evening as we continue our studies into this remarkable Old Testament manual of mission and evangelism, we want to ask three questions about this song, this prayer.

[2 : 27] Always remembering that our consistent approach throughout these studies is not to miss the wood for the trees, but to understand the bigger picture of Jonah.

First question, why the song? Second question, who's the singer? Third question, what's the point? Now, I sincerely hope that as we leave this building tonight, none of us will get caught up in the belly of a great whale out at Crow Road there, but you never know.

Stranger things have happened. More importantly, I want every one of us to leave this building tonight. Praising Jesus. That what Jonah and Israel could not be, he is.

First of all then, why this song? Why this prayer? And I'm using these words interchangeably. Now, the historic Christian church has always been known for its singing of the Psalms.

Whatever tradition you follow, the Psalms have been and continue to be a significant part of Christian worship. They constitute their own genre of art and music.

[3 : 39] The reformer John Calvin famously said of them, they are the anatomy of the soul. There is not an emotion of which anyone can be conscious, which is not represented here as in a mirror.

Now, this passage in Jonah 2 is a prayer, but it's also a psalm. It follows the pattern, the genre we call psalm.

Jonah 2 reads rather like Psalm 27, 34, 40, 116, 130, 118, the so-called songs of deliverance.

There's metaphor, there's emotion, there's reflection, there's logic. And perhaps that's not so surprising, given that having been brought up in a Jewish tradition, Jonah would have been very familiar with expressing himself using the thought world of the Psalms.

The song itself passes through three stages. First, it reflects on the terrifying situation Jonah finds himself in. The terrifying situation Jonah finds himself in.

[4 : 46] He uses the strongest of words to describe these circumstances and how he feels about them. Distress. The belly of Sheol. The deep, the heart of the seas.

Floods surrounding me. Waves and billows passing over me. Driven away from your sight. Waters closing in over me to take my life. The deep surrounding me. Seaweed wrapped around my head. At the roots of the mountains. The land whose barge closed upon me. The pit. My life ebbing away. You'll notice in verse 1 there.

That the belly of the fish. Verse 2 rather. The belly of the fish is described as Sheol. This Jewish murky underworld. Shadowy.

Filled with the spirits of the dead. There was a man in the next village to my own in the north. He lost his wife. And then he lost his older daughter both to cancer.

[5 : 51] And soon afterwards he himself was diagnosed with a painful throat cancer. And he said to a neighbor of his. Who I happen to be related to.

If there is a hell. I'm in it right now. If there is a hell. I'm in it right now. That's how he felt about the situation he found himself.

And that's how Jonah felt for these three days in the belly of that great fish. He's saying to us. If there's such a thing as a shield. A shadowy murky underworld.

Filled with the spirits of the dead. Then I'm there right now. The prophet also knows of course. It's all God's doing. It's God. Who in verse 3 has cast him into the deep. The waves and the billows in verse 3.

Belong to God. Jonah knows that nothing that's happened to him is random. But God has designed all these events down to the ferocity of the storm. And to the size of the fish's belly.

[6 : 54] In the second instance. The song describes Jonah's crying out to the Lord. Jonah's crying out to the Lord. Even though Jonah has physically fled from the presence of the Lord.

He now turns back to the God from whom he has fled. As we read. I called out to the Lord. Out of the belly of Sheol I cried.

When my life was fainting away. I remembered the Lord. My prayer came to you. These words. Calling. Crying.

Remembering. Praying. With the seaweed from the bottom of the sea. Circling his head. Jonah recognizes that the God who has cast him there. Is the God to whom he must cry for rescue.

You know I've prayed in some pretty strange places in my life. Operating theaters. Deathbeds.

[7 : 55] Great cathedrals. Gravesides. I remember praying once. Underwater. In the Maldives. On honeymoon. I spent 20 minutes. 60 feet.

Under. The surface. Praising God for the color of corals. But I've never cried out to God in circumstances such as these before. No.

Not out of the belly of a fish. Not in such a dramatic situation. But again. When you're at your wit's end. And you've got no other place to go. What else can you do except pray to the God whose providence led you there in the first place.

But then in the third instance. The song describes God's deliverance of Jonah. God's deliverance of Jonah. I shall look again. Verse 6.

Verse 4. Upon your holy temple. You brought up my life. From the pit. Verse 6. Now it should be obvious to us. Should it not.

[8 : 58] That Jonah is speaking of God's deliverance. Whilst yet remaining in the belly of the fish. God's not yet rescued him. But Jonah's so convinced that. God will rescue him.

That he speaks of it as a past action. Old Testament scholars call this figurative speech. A prophetic past. The writer is so confident.

Of God's salvation. That he writes about a future event. As though it was in the past. Jonah's as sure as he's possible to be sure. That God's going to rescue him from this living hell.

So that he'll get back to Jerusalem. And look upon God's temple. Of course you think. Jonah are you mad? There is no human way in the world. Of getting out of this fish's belly.

But where. Man falls. God succeeds. What's impossible with us. Is possible to God. Because of course. Perhaps we might think.

[9 : 55] How is it possible for three men. To survive a burning hot furnace. In Babylon. Well we can't imagine. God can. How is it possible. For. For. For Daniel to survive.

A whole night. In a den. Filled with hungry lions. But. What we can't imagine. God can. How is it possible. For sinful men and women. Like. Like us. To escape condemnation.

From God. On account of our sin. But what we can't imagine. God can. God. God. So there you have it. In this. In this song. In this prayer. In this psalm.

These three movements. Terrifying situation. Crying out to the Lord. God's salvation. Terrifying situation. Crying out to the Lord.

God's salvation. Now you might wonder to yourself. What on earth. Has this got to do. With evangelism and mission. Mission. What on earth. Has this got to do. With evangelism and mission.

[10:52] To which we answer. Everything. Everything. For all that Andrew Giffen. This morning. Spoke about. Projects.

He knows. I know. And you know. That mission. Is not about. Projects. Mission. Is all about. People. Mission's all about.

People. And the truth of the matter. Is. As we've said. From the very beginning. The biggest problem. With mission today. Is not the world. Outside the church. But the world.

Inside the church. And this chapter. Is teaching us. That before God. Can do a work. Through us. He must do.

A work. In us. That before. He wins the world. For Christ. He must first. Win us. In the belly. Of this fish. God's bringing. Jonah. To his senses.

[11:45] He's giving. Jonah. An opportunity. To figure out. What's of. First. Importance. In life. Is it his comforts. Is it his. Preferences. Is it his.

Idiosyncrasies. Or is it God's call. And passion. For the men and women. Of Nineveh. God. Takes Jonah. Down to a place. Of helplessness.

To bring him. To his senses. Now. I don't know. Who ever said this. But. I've discovered. By experience. That it's the truest thing. I've ever heard. In my life. We only.

Ever realize. That Jesus. Is all we need. When Jesus. Is all we have. We only ever realize. That Jesus. Is all we need.

When Jesus. Is all we have. So let me say that again. Before God. Can do a work. Through us. He must do a work. In us. That before he wins. The world.

[12:39] For Christ. He must first. Win us. We must learn. Of how little importance. Our own comforts. Preferences. And his syncreties. Are. We must learn.

First and foremost. The importance. Of a vital. Living relationship. With Jesus Christ. You see here. What we're doing. Is looking into. The innermost anatomy. Of the soul.

Of Jonah. And what we see. Is a man. Who's coming. To his senses. When there's no one else. Around. When there's no distractions. God does business. With his heart.

Now. Now. Think. Think of your own life. For a second. As you look. Back. Not.

Not as you're in the situation. But as you look. Back. Afterwards. You'll realize. That you learned. Far more about. God. When you're in the fish's belly.

[13:34] Than at any. Other time. In your life. If only. You have learned. This. That Jesus. Is all you need. When Jesus.

Is all you have. Only then. When. God's done that work. In you. Will he begin. To work. Through you. Why the song.

Okay. Second question. Who's the singer. Who's the singer. Now. This. Seem like. Seem like. A rather pointless question. Surely. The answer is clear. It's Jonah. From the belly.

Of the great fish. It's Jonah. Who prayed this prayer. Who wrote this psalm. And we've seen. Why this is most definitely true. Jonah needed to be taken down. A peg or two. Because. Before he'd do. What God called him to do.

To preach his message of grace. To Nineveh. He needed to be brought. To that place. Of utter helplessness. From where he realized. That he was entirely. In need of as much grace.

[14:32] As anyone else. The Ninevites. Needed God's help. And so did Jonah. And so it makes sense. From every perspective. Of course. To say.

Jonah. Of course. Is the singer of this song. But it goes deeper. We have already agreed. That Jonah stands.

In this book. As a representative. Of the nation of Israel. From our first study. On Jonah chapter one. We agreed. That God had commanded. Israel.

To be a light. Unto the nations. To bring. The word. Of his steadfast love. To all peoples. They were. To be a kingdom. Of priests. Mediating the grace.

Of God. To all the nations. Of the world. But they turned inward. They wanted to keep. God's grace. To themselves. They did not want. Their enemies. To enjoy.

[15:26] The same gospel. Blessings. They did. So let me suggest. As we consider. Jonah too. In the context. Of the theological story.

Of the Old Testament. It is the nation of Israel. Which is singing. This. Song. For Jonah. Read Israel.

You say to me. How so. And I'm asking you all. To put your thinking caps on. Right. How so. As we've seen. This song passes.

Through three stages. Terrifying situation. Crying out to the Lord. God's salvation. These three stages.

Are designed. To bring Jonah. To his senses. To get him back. To basics. And make him ready. To obey God. And preach. To the Gentiles. Now. As you read. Through the Old Testament.

[16:20] You are confronted. Time and again. With the situations. Faced. By the nation of Israel. Each of which. Was sent. Against them. By God.

To get them. Back to basics. To bring them. To their senses. To make them ready. To obey God. And to be the light. To the nations. God had called them to be.

You can chart them. Through the book of Judges. In the very early days. And then. Then the Assyrian oppression. Then the Babylonian captivity.

And so on. On each occasion. Of course. There's no physical fish. Nevertheless. In captivity. In Babylon. The Israelites.

Could have sung. Jonah's song. Read Psalm 137. Written. During their captivity. In Babylon. Read Psalm 88. Written.

[17:17] Long after Jonah died. And the crown of Judah. Lay broken in the dust. God brought the nation of Israel. To their knees. Through sending. Terrifying circumstances.

Into their experience. Before. The captivity in Babylon. Israel had become. Idol worshipers. Read the prophecy of Isaiah. After the captivity in Babylon.

Israel turned in upon itself. And shrouded the grace of God. Behind 10,000. Different rabbinic laws. To break them out of their blindness. God sent. Terrifying circumstances.

Into their experience. The Israelites. Then cried out to the Lord. In their distress. And God rescued them. You see the pattern here.

Between Jonah 2. And the whole history. Of the Old Testament. People of God. Terrifying situation. Cried out to the Lord.

[18:13] God rescues them. To bring them back to their senses. God brought them to their knees. To get them back to basics. God. God. God had to bring them back to bare bones.

To make them ready to obey. God had to break them. The eternal salvation. The salvation. Of tens of thousands of Ninevites. Was far more important.

Than the comforts. And the predilections. Of one stubborn Jewish prophet. The eternal salvation. Of billions of human beings. On planet earth. Was far more important.

Than the blessings. Of a stubborn Israel. What we've got here in Jonah 2. Is the story of the entire Old Testament.

Condensed down into one song. The reason for everything. That happened to Israel. The Babylonian captivity. So much more.

[19:12] God had called them. To be a light to the nations. To bring the word of his steadfast love. To all the peoples. They disobeyed God. God brought them back to their senses.

So you see. The ultimate singer of this song. In Jonah 2. Is not one lonely prophet. In the belly of a fish. But the whole nation. Of Israel.

You can interpret. The entirety. Of Israel's biblical history. In light of this. One. Song. Maybe. Just maybe. The reason the church in Scotland. Is passing through such. Difficult times at the moment. Is because God is sending circumstances. Into our experience.

To bring us back to him. To get us back to basics. To make us ready to obey him. In being priests. Mediating his grace.

[20:11] To the people of Scotland. Spreading his word in our nation. And beyond. He's doing a work in us. So he may do a work.

Through us. Now I know the second point. Has been difficult for you to understand. But I'm convinced. It is the right interpretation.

Of Jonah chapter 2. It is not merely. The prophet of Israel. Who's praying from the belly of a whale. It is the nation. Of Israel. Praying from the depths.

Of its suffering. And what is our response. To be to this. Surely it's found in verse 10. Verse 9 rather. But I with the voice of thanksgiving.

Will sacrifice to you. What I have vowed. I will pay. Salvation. Belongs. To the Lord. Our response. Is to get on with doing.

[21 : 08] What Christ has called us to do. And to make disciples. Of all the nations of the earth. Who's the singer of this song. So we've seen.

Why the song. Who's the singer of this song. And lastly. What's the point. Which you've probably been asking. Since the very beginning of this sermon.

Right. What's the point of this. What's the point. This is all very interesting. I'm sure. But what about Jesus. Where's Jesus here in this passage. I never want to hear a sermon.

Expounding scripture. Which stops short of warming my heart. By pointing me to Jesus. I would rather listen to a useless expositor.

Who points me to Jesus. Than listen to the most gifted expositor in the world. Who leaves me cold without him. Now ideally we want the man to be both.

[22 : 04] Because the best expositors. Are those who understand scripture well enough. To know that everything. Points to Jesus. So how does this passage.

Point to Jesus and the gospel. In every way. You don't have to trace the history of the nation of Israel. Far beyond Jonah.

To know that how many. For however many times. God brought them to their senses. They quickly reverted to type. You might think that. After they had learned.

From God. In the fires of fishy bellies. Babylonian captivity. A sad impression. They had become the most evangelistic nation on earth.

But by the time the Lord Jesus came. They were no further forward. Than they'd been in Jonah's day. In fact. They'd gone backwards. The Jews of Jesus day.

[23 : 04] Despised the Gentiles. They were the unclean. Whom God hated. The Jews lived in a comfort zone. Of their own preferences. A comfort zone.

Which left no room. For the Gentiles. But this is not what God. Had meant them to be. He had commanded them. To be a light to the nations. Bringing the message of God.

Steadfast love to all the peoples. Mediating God's grace. To a world lost in sin and darkness. Israel. Failed. What then will God do?

Having repeatedly given Israel the opportunity. To fulfill the task he had set for them. God now sends his own son. Jesus Christ.

You know how they say. If you want to do something properly. Do it yourself. You can take this from the history of Israel. Israel failed to mediate God's grace to the nations.

[24 : 09] To spread the message of God's steadfast love to the nations. To be a light to the nations. And so God sent his own son Jesus Christ.

The Jesus through whose life and death and resurrection. The Gentiles came in their millions. We included. To experience for ourselves. The love of God the Father.

This song. This psalm. This prayer. Points us indirectly to why Jesus came. He came to do that which the Israelites could not do.

To embrace the world and the love of God. And to declare that by faith in him. Anyone. Of whatever ethnicity. Background. Color or language. Be they Jew or Gentile.

Can be saved. That's the point of Jonah too. We need a better king than David. So God sent King Jesus.

[25 : 09] We need a better priest than Aaron. So God sent Jesus. We need a better prophet than Jonah or Israel. So God sent Jesus.

Jonah was unwilling to suffer for the sake of the gospel. Jesus suffered to bring the gospel into fruition. Jonah ran away from obedience to God.

Jesus ran toward obedience to God. We need a better prophet than Jonah. And we've got it in Jesus. And this brings us back full circle.

Does it not? To the issue of the strangest places in which to get married. Like underwater swimming with sharks. Hear you all?

Or in zero gravity. With Jonah and Ailey. Where and when finally. Listen up. Where and when finally are you.

[26 : 12] Going to commit yourself to Jesus. And follow him into the most amazing adventure. Known to humankind. The mission of the gospel.

When. If it's not now. When. If it's not here. Where. Hopefully. It will not take you a fish's belly. To bring you to your senses.

And get you back to God. Let us pray. Heavenly Father. Heavenly Father. We thank you for this passage from your word.

No matter how many times we read your word. We. We feel that your Holy Spirit speaks to us in a new way every time. And we thank you that this. Prayer.

This psalm. This song here in Jonah 2. Points us. Ultimately. To our need. Of a better prophet than Jonah. To a better prophet than the nation of Israel. It points us to Jesus.

[27 : 12] We pray that not one of us here would be left in any doubt. That right here and right now is the time. When we must commit ourselves to him. We ask these things in Jesus name.

Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.