

God's commitment to our deliverance and discipline

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Preacher: Sam Gorrick

[0 : 00] Alright, we're going to start in Jonah chapter 1 verse 15. And we're going to read there and then we're going to jump over and read a little bit of Matthew. So we'll start with Jonah 1 starting at 15.

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 Sheol I cried and you heard my voice. For you cast me into the depth, into the heart of the seas and the floods surrounded me.

All your waves and your billows passed over me. Then I said, I am driven away from your sight. Yet I shall again look upon your holy temple.

The waters closed in over me to take my life. The deep surrounded me. Weeds were wrapped around my head and the roots of the mountains.

[1 : 19] I went down to the land whose bars 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 into your holy temple.

Those who pay regard to vain idols forsake their hope of steadfast love. But I with the voice of thanksgiving will sacrifice to you what I have vowed I will pay.

Salvation belongs to the Lord. And the Lord spoke to the fish and had vomited Jonah out upon the dry land. Now just jumping over to Matthew chapter 12.

Starting at verse 38. I'm just going to read Matthew 12, 38 to 42. Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered him saying, Teacher, we wish to see a sign from you.

But he answered them, An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah.

[2 : 33] 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. The men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it.

For they repented at the preaching of Jonah. And behold, something greater than Jonah is here. The queen of the south will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it.

For she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon. And behold, something greater than Solomon is here. Good morning, dear church.

Lovely to be with you this morning. If you're visiting, welcome. My name is Sam and I'll be taking us through part two of Jonah this morning. Let's pray, shall we, and ask for God's help.

Dear Father, thank you for Jesus. Thank you that you have spoken to us through him. Thank you that we can speak to you now and that you hear us and that you invite us to talk to you anywhere, anytime.

[3 : 54] Please help us to listen this morning. Please help us to cast away distractions so that we can meet with you in your word this morning.

Amen. Alright, well last week Matt set up the series really nicely. Jonah is about God's big plan to gather his people from all nations.

And God is determined to bring this about. The terrifying storm and the videos Matt showed us suggest nothing can stand in God's way.

But as we enter chapter 2, what will God do with Jonah? Will God swipe him aside or palm him off because he's standing in the way?

When a business gets big, it gets a bit more impersonal. And when things go south in a big business, redundancies become acceptable losses.

[5 : 08] Is God's big plan like this? Is Jonah an acceptable loss to God? If God discards those who fail, could that be us?

Could we ever be an acceptable loss? Or is God just as committed to our deliverance and discipline as he is to his big plan?

God's deliverance and discipline of Jonah and us is, I think, the most prominent theme today. And by discipline, I don't mean punish.

I mean teach. Teach for growth and our good. And as Jonah discovers this morning, God's discipline is not enjoyable at the time, but is necessary for growth.

The sign of Jonah. There's two other themes in Jonah 2 that I'll touch on that we see in Matthew 12.

[6 : 15] The Pharisees and scribes come to Jesus wanting a sign. And what they were asking for was not just another miracle, but a miraculous proof to confirm Jesus' teaching.

And it was a common request to make of prophets, but the Pharisees had impure motives. And so Jesus says to them, I'm not going to give you another sign.

You already have the sign of Jonah. So what was the sign of Jonah? And Jesus says, Jesus says the sign of Jonah was Jonah.

We might ask what miraculous proof would Jonah's message to the Assyrians be? Jesus says Jonah wouldn't be given a sign to present to the Assyrians.

He wouldn't perform something. Jonah himself would be the sign that would confirm his message. Covered in seaweed.

[7 : 27] Stinking of fish vomit. Back from near death. He would be living proof of the message he was to carry. And that's why God delivered Jonah in such a miraculous way.

So that when he came to Nineveh, it would be obvious on whose authority he spoke. That's getting into next week, but is important to bear in mind for today.

Matthew's other point and the other theme, Jonah is a sketch of someone greater. Jesus will have his message confirmed in a deliverance from death like Jonah, only greater.

So the outline for today is Jonah's descent, which Martin has already helpfully introduced for us. Jonah's miraculous deliverance.

Rescue recalled in Jonah's prayer. The reason for rescue and something greater. Jonah's descent.

[8 : 35] Since chapter 1, if you want to turn back to chapter 1, Jonah's movement has been downward. He first goes down to Joppa in verse 3.

Then goes down into the inner part of the ship in verse 5. Then is hurled overboard and goes down into the deep. And as we've already heard this morning, at the start of this descent in verse 3 of chapter 1, we are told this would take him away from God's presence.

In one way, this is impossible. God is everywhere. So how should we understand this? If you can sort of remember the map that Matt showed to us last week, you had Israel on one side, Nineveh... Oh, yep, there we go. So Israel south of Nineveh, Nineveh above it, and Tarshish way out to the west.

Jonah is not just fleeing Nineveh, he is also fleeing God's promised land. The place at this point in history where God dwells with his people.

[9 : 54] It's reminiscent of the descent of Adam and Eve leaving the Garden of Eden. To move from God's presence is to leave his blessing and to be left with misery, curse, and death.

As Jonah moves downward, he will find out he is moving away from the source of all good, the fountain of living waters.

To come back to our question, what will God do with Jonah? In a big business, it might be convenient if he sank to the bottom of the ocean. God could then send the next prophet in the queue.

Is God just as committed to his people as his big plan? So we're going to get into the next part of our passage from verse 17 of chapter 1 and the miraculous deliverance.

In verse 17, it says, And the Lord appointed a great fish to swallow up Jonah. The fish swallows. And to this point in the Bible, the only thing that swallows is death and judgment.

[11 : 21] This is far from a friendly whale. Definitely doesn't have the polka dots and the fat, red lips, the fat, kissy red lips.

Reading on in the second half of verse 17, He was in the belly of the fish for three days and three nights.

And just as a tangent, if you're thinking Jesus was only in the tomb for two nights and the Bible is contradicting itself, here's what you need to know.

Three days and three nights is a long way of saying three whole days. For a Jew, an event that lasted part of a day was counted as a whole day.

So if there was a test match in Jerusalem that lasted two and a half days, they would count that as going for three whole days. Hopefully that makes a bit of sense there.

[12:27] But what's the deeper significance of three days? Three days stands for the time needed to confirm death. This is why Jesus waited three days to see Lazarus in John 11.

The time needed to confirm death. Sounds a bit ominous for Jonah. Other times, though, it stands for the time for something to go from death to life, for something to go the other direction.

Hosea 6 is an example of that. So when Jonah spends three days in the fish, we should be asking, is he going from life to death or is he going from death to life?

Will Jonah be dinner or delivered? Will Jonah be dinner or delivered? The other thing is this is a passage that's all about miracles.

And some of us might be wondering if this is made up. And that's, I think, a good question to ask. After all, it's highly unlikely that a person can survive inside a fish.

[13:43] I didn't know anything about sperm whales until last week. I did a quick bit of researching. But when they ingest a whole adult-sized squid, they don't sort of chew it up.

They just take it in whole and it goes into their first stomach. They're a bit like a cow in that they have more than one stomach. The squid passes whole into the first stomach.

The first stomach, its muscle walls are so strong that it crushes and pulverises the squid whole. And a bit of hydrochloric acid sort of helps things along.

The belly of a fish is not conducive to human life. And that's the point. Jonah has entered an environment that by all accounts should kill him.

Why? Because God is doing something great in bringing his message to the nations. And this requires a back from the dead type of miracle. Coming back to our question, will Jonah be dinner or delivered?

[14:55] The rest of our passage sort of goes on to answer that question. And here's sort of two reasons why we know the fish is used to deliver Jonah and bring him upwards from death to life.

On the ship in chapter 1, he's carried away from the land. And in the fish, he's carried back to dry land. The end of chapter 2, verse 10 tells us he's delivered to dry land.

Inside the ship, last week he was silent and sullen. Inside the fish, Jonah is full of prayer and thanksgiving. He understands he's being rescued.

So it's a fish to deliver, a fish to save. There's a second function of the fish too. The fish is appointed to discipline.

God appointed the great fish and that word appoint is used three other times. You want to flick over quickly to chapter 4, verse 6 to 8.

[16:05] Now the Lord God appointed a plant and made it come up over Jonah, that it might be a shade over his head to save him from his discomfort.

So Jonah was exceedingly glad because of the plant. But when dawn came up the next day, God appointed a worm that attacked the plant so that it withered. When the sun rose, God appointed a scorching east wind and the sun beat down on his head so that Jonah was faint.

God gives something good and takes it away. God gives something unpleasant. God is putting Jonah in situations that he will learn for his own good and growth.

God delivers us and also disciplines us.

He doesn't leave us in sinful patterns and so it is with Jonah. And while it's not enjoyable, it's love.

[17:17] We're now about to transition from ordinary writing to poetry. And it may seem like it's been kind of added in, Jonah's prayer, going from prose to poetry.

But Jonah's been pulled up from rock bottom. And the best way he can express his thankfulness is by using a psalm and poetry.

And Jonah's using a template here. He's using a template of a Thanksgiving psalm. And if you wanted to check out Psalm 18 at some stage, it sort of follows that same template.

Now I've simplified it to two parts, rescue recalled and reason for rescue. So rescue recalled from verse 2 to 6.

Finally, Jonah prayed. It took a lot. And the pagan sailors had already prayed by this point.

[18:19] And there's definitely some irony here in how much longer it took for Jonah to pray. And this raises a question. Because I think in this passage, we are supposed to sympathize with Jonah and relate with him.

Because, as it's already been mentioned, we can see ourselves in Jonah. So should we disqualify ourselves from calling upon God because of our prayerlessness?

Can we ever drift so far that we come to a place where we're beyond the assistance of God? Is God standing up there with arms folded, shaking his head and muttering under his breath?

So now you're turning up. Well, that's what we would be like, but not God. Verse 2.

Don't let your prayerlessness prevent you from praying.

[19:33] God wants to talk. The second half of verse 2 begins the crisis and the rescue recalled.

God wants to talk.

Turning to the book of Psalms and Exodus to describe his crisis and rescue. So we sort of have to know a bit about his family photo album to understand his crisis and rescue.

There's two sets of images or photos. The first set is in verse 2 to 6 and it's Sheol. We'll come to find what Sheol is.

The second set of images is flood imagery in verse 3 and 5. And these two images surround his central point like a sandwich in verse 4.

[20:53] I am driven away from your sight. And if this all sounds a bit confusing, Jonah is making one big point here. At the centre of his crisis, he is being driven away from God's sight.

He has put himself outside of God's presence. Let's turn to the first image, Sheol. What is Sheol? It's an Old Testament word with multiple meanings that all sort of describe different aspects of death.

It can mean ultimate death. A literal place of punishment and eternal separation. It can mean bodily death, which happens to us all.

And third, it can mean a state of terrible distress in which you're alive but you're facing such awful circumstances. It feels like death and something you cannot escape from.

Jonah is alive and so he's using the word in this sense. In verse 6, he sort of describes it in vivid imagery as this place.

[22:05] I went down to the land whose bars close upon me forever. That's not a literal place. But he's saying that it feels like I'm locked in.

Like I can't get out. Well, what can we learn from Jonah's use of this image of Sheol? Well, Jonah was alive but experiencing death.

So we could say Jonah was alive. He had a pulse. His heart was beating. But he wasn't fully living. Which begs the question, what is it to fully live?

And it comes back to the same point. Jonah ran from God's presence in chapter 1. God gave Jonah what he wanted for long enough to realize life outside of his presence was not all it was cracked up to be.

Life outside of God's presence was not life at all. Yet verse 6, second half of verse 6. God is still there.

[23:14] Yet you brought up my life from the pit. God is still there. God is still there. After recalling his rescue from Sheol, he moves to the next image, which is water.

We love water in Australia. The beach is the destination for most of our holidays. But for a Jew, it was a bit more complex.

In a dry climate, water was life, but deep water was a source of fear and something to be escaped from.

So verse 3 and 5, the images are of deep water, to be in a vast expanse alone. Some time ago at Fresh, we played a game and we had three different images.

We had the ocean and like a life raft, so a picture of being alone in the ocean. Snakes, a picture of a whole bunch of snakes and spiders.

[24:23] And I can't remember the point of the game, but the kids had to sort of stand on the picture that they were most afraid of. And I sort of chose the picture of the ocean because that's one of my fears, like being in the ocean alone in that vast expanse.

Anyway, I thought they'd all choose spiders or snakes, but they all stood on the ocean picture. To be alone in that vast expanse is scary stuff.

Jonah envisions not just deep water, but a river crossing. Verse 3, Is Jonah in the sea or the river? Verse 5, The waters closed in over me to take my life. The deep surrounded me. River reeds, that's what it means literally, Wrapped around my head.

Is Jonah in the sea or the river? Jonah is actually flipping through the family photo album, looking at Exodus 15.

[25 : 45] Exodus 15 is the song Moses composed after crossing the Red Sea. Literally, the Sea of Reeds. If you'd like to turn to Exodus 15, feel free to.

I'll read out just a couple of verses so you can get the idea. And as I read, look out for the words deep, flood and reeds, which Jonah uses.

So Exodus 15, just verse 4 to 5. For Israel, crossing was deliverance through God's judgment.

As they crossed the Red Sea, they literally would have seen great walls of water heaping up either side of them. They saw God's judgment either side of them, yet they were unharmed.

Looking through the family photo album, Jonah realizes he is having an experience of God's judgment. Let's look at verse 3 again. You cast me into the deep, into the heart of the seas.

[27 : 18] All the flood surrounded me, either side. And all your waves and your billows have passed over me. I sort of had a bit of a question that is Jonah sinking in these flood waters of judgment?

Is Jonah passing through like Israel or is he sinking like Pharaoh? And at one point in my preparation, I thought he, Jonah, was sinking like Pharaoh.

A sort of irony, he, an Israelite, sinking like an Egyptian while the Gentile sailors are up there on the surface, safe and sound. But then I read closer. Verse 3 again.

The flood surrounded me. I saw those walls of water either side of me. And then all your waves and your billows have passed over me.

Jonah uses past tense. Jonah says, your judgments are now behind me. They're in the rear view mirror. Having been scooped up in the belly of the fish, Jonah can say, your waves and your billows passed over me.

[28 : 38] Circumstances can overwhelm us. Trials tend to come like sets of waves, one after the other. And God is probably teaching us good things in these times which we would not learn otherwise.

But be assured God's judgment on our sin, even this week, is only ever in the rear view mirror. The water theme concludes in verse 10 of chapter 2.

Jonah has walked through and is delivered to dry land. He's delivered to a new beginning, which is why chapter 3 sounds a lot like chapter 1.

He's covered in vomit, but he's been delivered to dry land, safe to shore. We'll come to verse 4 now, because it's the sort of middle of the sandwich and the most important part.

And Jonah is really making just the same point that he's made previously with the two images.

Jonah was probably cold, fearful, lonely, deprived of all creaturely comfort.

[29 : 54] But these circumstances are not at the centre of his crisis. At the centre, he says, I am driven away from your sight.

Self-inflicted suffering taught Jonah that the worst thing that could happen to him was being forsaken by God. To go through all this and be abandoned.

It's really like the worst thing, isn't it, that can happen to a human, to be abandoned. Yet the second half of this verse says, Yet I shall again look upon your holy temple.

Jonah learnt a twin truth. Jonah learnt the thing to be dreaded the most cannot happen.

Jonah is certain he will either be in God's presence or receive help from him. Why he could be certain and why he was rescued, we will now turn.

[31 : 15] So this is reason for rescue. After recalling his crisis, Jonah repeats his appeal for mercy and his call for help in verse 7 to make it stand out.

God had sent the fish long before Jonah had called out.

God appointed the fish. It says, As Jonah was hurled into the deep. God did not have his hands tied until the moment Jonah called out.

God had initiated Jonah's deliverance long before. In the moments Jonah gave up on God, God had not given up on him.

And here's the reason for rescue in verse 8. Those who pay regard or cling to vain idols forsake their hope of steadfast love. Steadfast love is the reason for rescue.

[32 : 25] It's the word hesed, which is a beautiful picture of when someone in a high position commits to acting in the best interests of someone in a lower position for the long haul.

When the Supreme Court of New South Wales makes an adoption order, they have to be convinced it's in the best interests of the child.

A person in a higher position acting in the best interests of a person in a lower position for keeps. So steadfast love is this picture of covenant or agreement the Lord makes with his people.

And so a likely interpretation of verse 8 is that Jonah, now humbled and clinging to the Lord, is saying to his fellow Israelites, those who are forsaking your hope of steadfast love, the reason the Lord committed to Jonah's deliverance and discipline.

He won't give up on us, even when we give up on him. We also, though, need to hear Jonah's warning. Don't forsake the steadfast love of the Lord by clinging to vain idols.

[34 : 09] Perhaps this ought to inform the way we think about times of trial and loss. God can and will remove lesser goods that become our vain idols so that we cling to God himself.

Jonah finishes his prayer by proclaiming, Salvation comes from the Lord. Jonah is now fit to declare the excellencies of him who called him out of darkness and into his marvellous light.

However, he was vomited out And so not all lessons have been learnt as we shall see as we move into chapters 3 and 4 in the coming weeks Something greater than Jonah is here Where would you rank Jonah among the prophets of the Old Testament?

I think most of us would probably rank him fairly lowly Maybe actually giving him the wooden spoon In the book of Jonah he spoke just 8 words of prophecy If we give Jonah the wooden spoon it's sort of awkward Because Matthew thinks of him highly enough to compare him to Jesus So in what sense is Jonah great?

That Jesus may be considered even greater Matthew chose Jonah because of the Lord's great deliverance of him Which declared the Lord's steadfast love to those who looked on So three brief points about Jesus in comparison to Jonah to finish The three points are He came down Like Jonah he was forsaken And like Jonah he is risen Like Jonah Jesus had to descend To be miraculously delivered to confirm his message Jonah descended rebelliously Jesus went willingly Not even the suffering that lay ahead could deter him Love overcame all obstacles

[36 : 47] But who do we speak of? Who came down? The Christmas song Once in Royal David City Says He came down to earth from heaven Who is God and Lord of all Isn't that the best news?

Glenn Scrivener Writes this He came down to our darkness from heaven above He stooped to the crib and the cross out of love He shared in our weakness, meekness and mess And still he embraced us nevertheless Like Jonah Jesus was forsaken But not for his own sin Jonah called out and God answered Jesus cried out My God, my God Why have you forsaken me?

And there would be no immediate answer Rescue or respite Jesus had all God's wrath poured upon him for our sin And in this he became sin Who knew no sin Quoting the Heidelberg Catechism This Jesus did In order that he might set us free Body and soul From eternal condemnation And gain for us God's grace Righteousness and eternal life This he did To assure me in times of personal crisis and temptation That Christ my Lord By suffering unspeakable anguish Pain and terror of soul Especially on the cross But also earlier Has delivered me From anguish and torment of hell Like Jonah

He is risen Yet Jesus' resurrection Was not just for himself Jesus was raised As the head Of the church The head of this church And Jesus is not ashamed To call himself Our head As the head of the church He secured safe passage Through those floodwaters of judgment Emerging the other side To dry land And new creation Because Jesus has done The heavy lifting As our captain We can be assured His body The church Will follow God is just As committed To our deliverance And discipline As his big plan And Jesus shows Neither will fail Let's pray Dear Father

We can see ourselves At times In this story Of Jonah But we thank you That you Are just as committed To our deliverance And discipline As this big Great plan To gather In the nations We thank you For Jesus Who is not ashamed To be our head And captain We thank you That he has done The heavy lifting And ensured Our own deliverance We pray That knowing this Would help us To lean into Times of discipline And discomfort Knowing that they Are our own good For our good Amen