

# Hope in Distress

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[ 0 : 0 0 ]     Let's join together in a word of prayer. Let's pray. Lord, as we come together once more this evening, we ask once more you would incline our hearts to a stance that is ready for worship.

Incline our hearts and our minds and our very souls to worship you well just now. We come just now and we give you praise to the privilege we have of meeting together like this.

The privilege we have of sitting side by side and in the company of our brothers and sisters. Of those who we serve alongside now and those who will be beside us and with us indeed for the rest of eternity.

As we join together with that eternal worship. Lord, to join together in the new heavens and the new earth praising you. Lord, until those glorious times come.

Until that new age is ushered in. Help us, we ask, to be faithful servants in the place you have set us. And with the gifts and with the mission field you have placed us in.

[ 1 : 1 1 ]     We pray especially this evening for our own mission field here. The mission field, Lord, of North Holster. The mission field we find ourselves worshipping in. And the mission field we find ourselves living in.

We pray just now for your people. Your people here this evening who are living in homes where perhaps they are the only Christian. Living in homes where perhaps they bear the burden for being the witness and the salt and the light.

We ask, Lord, you would encourage these dear sisters and these dear brothers. Those who are seeking to be solid witnesses day by day. Those who are praying with love in their hearts for their husbands and their wives.

For their children. Perhaps some praying for parents. Praying for brothers and for sisters. Praying for family members who they live with or who they are close with.

And who as of yet show no gospel interest. Praying for brothers and sisters. We pray, Lord, for your people here this evening. Who are seeking to serve you in places of work.

[ 2 : 1 8 ]     Who are seeking to be witnesses, Lord, against a world which hates you. We pray, Lord, that you would enable them to be diligent in their work. To be faithful in their serving of you.

We give you praise that we are able to serve you even by doing our own private work well. That all that we do will be done for your glory and to your praise. We pray this evening for those who are retired.

And those who live in this village. And those who interact daily with their neighbours. And with other members of this community. Lord, we ask for these brothers and these sisters. You give them strength.

Help them to be faithful witnesses as they go about their business in this place. We know that this is a place where there is much change. And over the years there has been much change of the folks who live here.

Lord, we give you praise that you have brought people to this place. This place where the gospel is still known. This place where your name is still glorified and praised. And we ask as you bring people to this place.

[ 3 : 18 ] Bring people to move here and to stay here. And to make their lives and even their living here. You would do so in order to bring them to hear the gospel. Give us wisdom, we ask, Lord.

To take every gospel opportunity that you give us. We confess that we are so often unable to lay hold on the clear gospel chances you give us.

As you give us people to talk with. And as opportunities come and as opportunities go. As we do not take full use and full advantage of the conversations you have allowed us to become a part of.

Lord, forgive us. Forgive us for the times we let embarrassment. Perhaps even to our own shame. The times we let shame cloud our words and stop our mouths.

The times we don't make the full use of the providential workings. Lord, you have given us. As we interact with people in our own homes. In this village and our work.

[ 4 : 19 ] Lord, help us to be salt and to be light in this place. Help us to be bold and brave witnesses. As we see the days becoming shorter. And the days becoming darker.

As we see confusion and darkness and sin rule and reign. Even in our island. Lord, we come to you once more. We ask you would revive us first. Before we pray and beg for the revival of our villages.

Revival of our island. Lord, we ask for revival of your people. We ask for revival in our own lives. Revive in us a heart that is seeking after you. Revive in us a heart that is reclaiming its first love.

Revive in us a spirit that is willing to serve you despite personal cost. Revive in us that desire, that zeal to serve you in this place. Revive in us that zeal to grow together as family.

Lord, we ask these things knowing that we can manufacture none of these things in our own lives. Revive in us by our own efforts. But we know that you work in us. Your Holy Spirit.

[ 5 : 26 ] That he is in us. That each day he is shaping us and transforming us. Each day we are going through that work of sanctification. Being made more and more like our glorious saviour.

We pray as that work continues. We would see ongoing evidence of that work in our lives. We pray we see evidence of that work in the lives of those around us.

And help us to be encouragers. As we see that work of sanctification take place. That work of gospel growth. Help us to encourage our brothers and our sisters. We pray, Lord, that we are often such poor encouragers.

But we live in a day where we need so much encouragement. We do pray, Lord, for this gospel family here. This family of brothers and sisters. As we seek to serve you in this place.

We ask we would grow up together as one family. Keep us united, we pray. We do thank you for the evidence of unity in this place. The gifting of unity.

[ 6 : 24 ] We confess, Lord, that we are often individually so inclined to disrupting that unity. We know that unity is a gift from you. But more than that, Lord, we come this evening and we know that disunity without gospel clarity.

Disunity without gospel reasoning. Disunity from personal pride. It is of the evil one. Lord, we ask you to keep us far from that. Keep us far from that place.

Keep disunity, Lord, and other such realities far from your people here. Help us with one mind and one spirit to serve you in this place.

We ask for days, Lord, where we'd hear of great gospel blessing. Days where the darkest of homes here would come to know and love and serve you. With that in mind, we do again pray for our brothers and sisters.

Indeed, our friends next door. As they also seek to do your work in this place. We give you praise, Lord, that despite our own personal denominational divisions.

[ 7 : 26 ] That these things do not stop the gospel growth. We do pray, Lord, for that gospel growth across our nation. Across our island. Across even our world this evening. We know that nothing is a barrier to you.

Not culture nor language. Not even the opposition of nation states. Not even the opposition of governments. Not even the death of your people.

Not even the attempted destruction of the church. But all these things do not stop the spread of the gospel. I give you praise just now for the places around this world where the gospel is indeed spreading.

And it's spreading in the midst of such hardship. It is spreading in the midst of such opposition. Places in this world where the government itself doesn't just hate.

But the government itself actively opposes your people. Lord, we pray for these nations. We pray for our brothers and our sisters serving you in these nations. We ask you to give them strength and give them guidance.

[ 8 : 24 ] And give them wisdom. Our brothers and sisters who are willing to even lay down their freedom. At times their lives. For the sake of the gospel.

Help us not to forget them. Help us to hold them up before you in constant prayer. Daily remembering your kind providence towards us. That we live in a country where despite opposition.

We are still free to publicly, as we are just now, proclaim the gospel. We do pray as we see perhaps things changing even in our own nation. Or as we perhaps see a change of time.

And a change of day. And a change of sentiment towards your church. And towards the gospel. We do pray you would give us wisdom in the days and months and years to come.

Lord, help us to be faithful to the gospel cause no matter what comes our way. Help us as a people here. As a gathering of your people. To remain faithful to the gospel cause. Regardless of what the world may say or may attempt to do.

[ 9 : 27 ] Lord, give us wisdom. We ask in all these things. We confess that we feel ourselves so small. We feel the task so big. At times the task is impossible. And we confess it is impossible.

But we come today and we bring these worries, these anxieties. We come today and we bring this impossible task to you. And we know that what's impossible for us.

What is beyond our abilities. Is not impossible to you. That you can bring in. Even in this place. You can bring in the most unlikely of people.

Even their community. You can bring in the darkest and furthest away person from you this evening. That they can be transformed and changed by you. Lord, help us, we ask, to remember these dear people.

Help us this week, we ask, to have our minds and our hearts ready to come before you next week. And to understand what it is we are doing. That we are partaking in the glorious feast of the bread and the wine.

[ 10 : 30 ] Remembering our Lord and his work. Remembering his death. Remembering his person. Until he comes again. Help us to do so, Lord. In the right spirit and the right heart.

Help us to do so in joy. Knowing that we have a saviour who has died for us, yes. But one who now lives and reigns for all time at your right hand. It's in his name we ask these things this evening.

It's in his strength alone we come. Clinging to him. Knowing that as we cling on to him. But despite our efforts. That he holds firmly on to us. It's in that confidence we rest.

And in that confidence we come. It's in all these things in and through. And for his precious name's sake. Amen. Let's again sing to God's praise.

Amen. Let's sing to God's praise. We are going to sing from Psalm 88.

[ 11 : 28 ] We sang part of this psalm last week. We are now saying the second part of the psalm. Scottish Psalter and Psalm 88. We said last week this is what some would call the darkest.

One of the darkest humanly speaking passages in scripture. There is little hope to be seen in this psalm. It's a psalm of distress. And it's good for us that this psalm is in scripture.

This psalm paints for us the reality. What it is to find yourself in deep distress. Psalm 88. We can read from verse 6 of the psalm. Psalm 88.

We sing verses 6 down to verse 12. To God's praise. I love thy heart.

on me thou hast seen with all my ears the last truth come from me my face thou makes them to our me and I am so shall my time find no deviation for me by reason of affliction my high force go holy to thee

[ 14 : 00 ] Lord do thy call and set my hands on one snow and earth to earth to Lord Shout in heaven, thy love be torn in death, thy head for hands.

Shout in heaven, thy love be torn in death, thy love be torn in death, thy love be torn in death.

Thy love be torn in death, thy love be torn in death.

The Bible is called for Church Bibles. Jonah chapter 2 on page 7 to 6. Let's hear the word of God.

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.

[ 16 : 17 ] Out of the belly of shul I cried, and you heard my voice. For you cast me into the deep, into the heart of the seas, and the flood 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. The deep surrounded me. The weeds were wrapped about my head. At the roots of the mountains.

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.

[ 17 : 20 ] Salvation belongs to the Lord. And the Lord spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah out upon the dry land. Now turning back to the book of Psalms.

Again, the psalm we just sang. The book of Psalms in Psalm 88. It's on page 463 of the psalm book. Psalm 88 on page 463.

The book of Psalms. Psalm 88. O Lord God of my salvation, I cry out day and night before you.

Let my prayer come before you. Incline your ear to my cry. For my soul is full of troubles, and my life draws near to show.

I am counted among those who go down to the pit. I am a man who has no strength. Like one set loose among the dead. Like the slain that lie in the grave.

[ 18 : 19 ] Like those whom you remember no more. For they are cut off from your hand. You have put me in the depths of the pit. In the regions dark and deep.

Your wrath lies heavy upon me. And you overwhelm me with all your waves. Selah. You have caused my companions to shun me. You have made me a horror to them.

I am shut in so that I cannot escape. My eye grows dim through sorrow. Every day I call upon you, O Lord. I spread out my hands to you.

Do you work wonders for the dead? Do the departed rise up to praise you? Selah. Is your steadfast love declared in the grave?

Are your faithfulness in abaddon? Are your wonders known in the darkness? Are your righteousness in the land of forgetfulness? But I, O Lord, cry to you.

[ 19 : 18 ] In the morning my prayer comes before you. O Lord, why do you cast my soul away? Why do you hide your face from me? Afflicted and close to death from my youth up.

I suffer your terrors. I am helpless. Your wrath has swept over me. Your dreadful assaults destroy me. They surround me like a flood all day long.

They close in on me together. You have caused my beloved and my friend to shun me. My companions have become darkness. We praise you, God, for his perfect, his honest and his glorious word.

Let's again sing to his praise. We can sing again from the Scottish Psalter and from Psalm 89, the following psalm. Scottish Psalter and Psalm 89.

And from hopelessness we now sing of God's love and God's mercy. Psalm 89 on page 344 of the Psalm books. God's mercies I will ever sing.

[ 20 : 23 ] And with my mouth I shall. Thy faithfulness make to be known to generations all. For mercy shall be built, said I, forever to endure. Thy faithfulness even in the heavens.

Thou wilt establish sure. Psalm 89 verses 1 to 5. To God's praise. God's mercies I will ever sing.

God's mercies I will ever sing. God's mercies I will ever sing. But with my mouth I shall. Thy faithfulness give to me more.

to end the vision's own. For mercy shall be the set of light on earth, the truth and true.

Thy faithfulness, here in the heavens, the world each shall be shown.

[ 21 : 50 ] I will my chosen one, thou King, but come not gracious me.

Come to myself, come to my love, to dim this warm how I am.

But I die, she is a wish out forever to begin.

And will two generations of life fulfilled and maintained.

The praises of thy wonders for the heavens shall exist.

[ 23 : 15 ] And in the confidation of his sight in goodness.

Let's turn for a short time to the chapter we had in Jonah chapter 2. In Jonah chapter 2 and taking in, of course, the whole chapter this evening.

Taking for our text, though, we take the last verse of chapter 1. Chapter 1 verse 17, just to prepare us for the rest of the chapter. Chapter 1 verse 17.

And the Lord appointed a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.

We, of course, left Jonah last week at the end of chapter 1. He is sinking. He's been cast into the sea. He's been cast adrift. And as far as Jonah is concerned, he has no help.

[ 24 : 22 ] He has no hope. Of course, we know the accounts. It's hard. We have to try and put ourselves in Jonah's mindset for this chapter. He did know what help was coming his way.

We know the story. But poor Jonah, he didn't. And in chapter 2, our text this evening, this whole chapter, this is Jonah's summary of his sinking down.

Of course, chapter 2 has been written or he's compiled or composed, that we could say, after his rescue. But chapter 2 summarizes for us Jonah's thoughts, his feelings, his experience.

As he's cast out of the boat, as he sinks down and down, as he drifts further and further away from help, we see the mind of poor Jonah.

Brothers and sisters, as we come to this passage this evening, I said we take a short view. And we're taking a short view, not because of lack of content, but quite the opposite.

[ 25 : 27 ] We're taking a short view, with the Lord's help, because there is so much in this passage which I could give countless illustrations for, but which still perhaps wouldn't speak to your specific situation, to your life.

As we come to this passage, it's essential for us, we come to these verses honestly this evening. We must come to this text ready to ask and to answer the honest questions for ourselves.

And only you and I can be honest. Only you and I know what we truly think. And we'll see later on, our outward appearance often betrays us. But the reality is, we can so often look the parts sound apart, but inside be a mess.

And we'll see that more as we go on. But just to be honest this evening, first of all, to be honest with ourselves about our times of great darkness in our lives as believers.

Times of great darkness in our lives as believers. And secondly, honest with ourselves about our times in our lives as believers, where we feel just so lost and so alone.

[ 26 : 43 ] And so alone. That's the groundwork we must begin our study looking from. These two truths, which I know are true for every Christian. We see our own sin, our own darkness.

At times we feel abandoned. At times we feel lost. At times, providence is nothing but confusion for us. Before we begin in detail, just to speak to those here who as of yet, and perhaps those who may listen in the future, who as of yet don't, you can't say truly that you know Jesus for yourself.

If that's you this evening, if you are here this evening, we're thankful for you. We're more than thankful for you. We praise the Lord you're here. Genuinely, we do. If you can say, if you cannot yet say that Jesus is yours, that you know him, that you love him, this chapter is a reminder for you that Christians and non-Christians, those who know Jesus and who love him, and those who as of yet can't say that they know or love him, that we all face many, almost all the same struggles in life.

The same worries in our own personal lives. The same struggles of, of family problems, personal problems, health problems, physical and mental, money worries, physical worries, and so on, and so on, and so on.

We all face almost the full swathe of problems, the same as one another. As we look at this passage, we also note the one difference that separates those here this evening who are facing hard times, who are Christians, and those who are facing hard times, who as of yet cannot say that they are Christians.

[ 28 : 32 ] What's the difference? The difference is that the Christian knows the love and the care and the protection of the Lord, even whilst they are sinking down into the depths of the ocean, as it were.

The Christian knows that even though life is hard at times, and at times life is hard for a long time, the Christian knows, doesn't feel it, not saying the Christian feels it, but the Christian knows it, that life is hard and times are hard, but we have a saviour who keeps us.

That's the difference. Don't for a second believe the false gospel, the false gospel of believe in Jesus and life is easy. Believe in Jesus and life suddenly becomes okay.

There are many who believe that and the second life becomes complicated or hard going, they fall away from faith. And little wonder, because the Jesus they've been presented with is one who is just useless.

A Jesus who has only nice words to say. A Jesus who can't actually look after them or keep them. That's not the Jesus we see in the scripture. The Jesus we know, the Jesus we love is one who promises to keep his people, to sustain his people.

[ 29 : 56 ] And not one who promises there'll be no hard times, quite the opposite. Scripture tells us that those who know Jesus will face incredibly tough times, because he himself faced trials and tribulations.

Therefore, those of us who follow him will also fail, will also face times of trial and times of great tribulation. Amen. Jesus keeps his people and does not let them go, even in the midst of trouble.

All that being said, we have our text just in three, again, very broad points. First of all, looking at our verses here, we see the place of distress. Where does our distress come from?

What's it like to be in distress? Then we can see the pain of distress. What does it feel like when we find ourselves in distress? And finally, we see rescue.

How does God rescue us from the place of distress? How did he rescue Jonah? How does he rescue his people today? But first, before we begin, we must, as it were, briefly look at the, let's say, the elephant in the room, but I guess it's the whale in the room, some people might say.

[ 31 : 15 ] We ignored verse 17 last week. We stopped at verse 60, but our whole text this evening focuses around verse 17. Because Jonah has been rescued.

Jonah is safe. The question is, how was Jonah rescued? How was Jonah kept safe? There's often so much emphasis on the great fish in this chapter.

So much emphasis on the fish in the account of Jonah. And the reality is, the fish only features twice in the whole account. Once here in verse 17, and once more in verse 10 of chapter 2.

That's it. The fish is nothing else other than a place for Jonah to be rescued into, but he kept safe and that's it. The author who wrote the account of Jonah's experience, he doesn't even explain anything more other than a fish was sent by the Lord, swallowed Jonah, and eventually spat him out again.

That's it. That's it. And of course, we must say fish because perhaps we might say whale, but the text gives us no explanation what this fish was.

[ 32 : 26 ] A great fish, a big fish, that's it. And it's amazing. If you spend any time looking into this, you'll soon find the most wacky and just far-out understandings of what this fish was, what it means.

There are those who will spend, and when you read it, great lengths, great time spent trying to explain away what this fish really means, what it really was.

And it feels almost silly to give examples, but one example which is just so left-field, but one example which I want to mention because it's a popular modern example that people use to explain away the fish, is that there's no fish at all.

There's no fish at all. It's just a cultural misunderstanding. When it says here that Jonah spent time in the belly of the fish, really that is just a place he stayed.

And it's an inn, and the inn perhaps had a name similar to the great fish. It was a place Jonah spent time to rest three days and three nights. And at the end of his rest, he then left this inn, or so to speak, he was vomited out of the inn.

[ 33 : 40 ] And you think, what's a load of nonsense? But you'll be surprised. You'll be surprised there is plenty of pages and near enough books written to explain away all about this great fish.

A fish which appears again in two verses. And to focus in the fish, it's to lose sight. It's to not see the wood for the trees because we're seeing the reality here that this is not about a fish.

Yes, that's what God used to preserve Jonah. But this is an account about God's faithfulness, God's love, God's care. If we get stuck on the fish, then we're losing sight.

This is a sovereign God who created the heavens and the earth, who has called this man to go and to save and to preach redemption, to preach salvation to a city of Nineveh.

God is speaking to him. And if we think the problem here is that God cannot send a fish to look after Jonah, but God somehow can't keep Jonah alive, then we have such a small, such a low view of God.

[ 34 : 51 ] The fish is real. This happened to Jonah. The details, we don't know. The author didn't say it. God didn't include it.

It's not for us to dig into. A fish came and somehow Jonah survived three days, protected and kept safe in this animal.

Now we're not saying that the fish isn't important, it is, and we'll see that perhaps next week it has importance, it has significance. But reality is, this is not about a fish. This is about Jonah and God's goodness to Jonah and by extension God's goodness to a people who do not deserve it.

An account of God's mercy. In that mercy, we find this curious chapter, chapter two, this chapter which is a poem, it's a psalm, it's written to be sung, it's a poem written by Jonah about his account of his time of distress.

Before the fish rescued him, Jonah is adrift on his own and he cries out and brings us to the place of distress. Jonah's place of distress, it is so clear to us.

[ 36 : 08 ] Verses one down to verse three, we see where he is. He is sinking down and down and down and across and away into the sea. He's sinking down into the depths, but for all his, as it were, physical sinking, for all his physical danger, we see in chapter two that as he sinks down physically, as he drifts away physically, it's matched also by his spiritual drifting, his spiritual sinking.

And although verses one down to verse three, this section is ultimately about the Lord's rescue off of Jonah, at least verses one and verse two are about his rescue.



We can take verses one down to verse three to help us see the place of his distress. Verse one, at the end of verse one, I cried 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.

His place of distress is the belly of Sheol, literally the belly of the grave. You've covered us, I'm sure, plenty of times under the last ministry.

The word Sheol had many uses but the general use was to represent death and the grave. Death and the grave. And Jonah is saying, out of the belly of the grave, out of the depths of death itself of my end, I cried.

[ 37 : 44 ] Jonah has never been in this place before. He has never been this distressed, this close to death before. Jonah has never been this far away from God before.

And here he is crying out to God from this place of great distress, from the very depths of the grave itself. and here's one of our first questions we have to ask this evening.

Brothers and sisters, I'm getting to know some of you and I'm fully aware it will take months, if not years, to get to know you perhaps properly.

We all put our barriers up and that's fine, we all have our quirks that way. But I'm getting to know you slowly but surely. The truth is, I don't know your stories.

And supposing I did know you, supposing I grew up amongst you in this congregation, I still wouldn't know your story truly or fully. And the question is, brothers and sisters, have you or are you perhaps even currently in this place of great distress?

[ 38 : 55 ] Have you had the same experience as poor Jonah here is going through? Have you cried out to the Lord from a place that is at least feels like you're in the belly of death itself, in the depths of death itself?

We said at the start, outward appearance means nothing. You can sit there and I can stand here, dress the part, we can all sound the part, look the part, have our chats and go home again.

And our life be a complete and utter shambles, a complete and utter mess. We can sit here just now and nod away and look interested but the reality is we are going through a painful situation, a dark situation, a distressing situation.

I was speaking last year to a minister in her own examination and he was a, when he was a young Christian he hadn't long been saved and he had real problems understanding Christians who could go through real backsliding and Christians who could go through times of mental anguish and of mental issues and spiritual issues and spiritual anguish and he had this problem for a few years he was saying until what happens to this man?

What happens to this man? He grows cold in his faith, he grows distant from the Lord and he begins to backslide and backslide and whilst he's backsliding spiritually then life takes over and things outwith his control take place in his life and he found himself then in a complicated family situation, a complicated personal situation and whilst going through a complicated spiritual situation.

[ 40 : 49 ] This man who once said Christians, real Christians don't experience these things thought himself at the mercy of three distressing situations all at once.

I can't see your mind, I can't know your experience but can you see yourself uttering the same words that Jonah utters here? Have you been in a place where you can say you've cast me into the deep, into the heart of the seas and the flood surrounded me, all your waves and your billows passed over me?

Do you know what it is to feel beyond help? Have you ever felt beyond not even just your help but beyond the Lord's care, beyond the Lord's help?

Have you experienced what it is to feel as if you're on your own completely? Abandoned perhaps? Shut away from God by your own actions perhaps or even by actions but nothing to do with yourself, by external situations, family breakdown, personal situation and so on and so on.

Have you felt as poor Jonah feels here in these verses a way beyond the care, beyond the help even of God? Perhaps like Jonah, perhaps like Jonah, your distance from God is because of sin.

[ 42 : 19 ] Perhaps you are backsliding. Perhaps you have backslidden and again I say this carefully because I do not know your stories, dear friends. I'm not saying this in a place of knowledge, I'm saying this in a place of ignorance and I mean that truly.

Ignorance of your stories so far. Perhaps you're backsliding now and perhaps no one knows you're going through this place of sin against the Lord. Perhaps no one else knows that your heart has grown cold against God.

No one sees or knows that you've stopped reading scripture. No one sees or knows that you've stopped praying. Perhaps you still come out and look the part and dress the part and so on but your heart has long since grown cold and grown away.

You've long since felt like you've been sinking down and down away from the face and the presence of God like poor Jonah was here. Perhaps you think to yourself yes I know the Lord and yes I love the Lord but like Jonah I've gone too far away from him.

I've gone too far the opposite way from him. Too far away towards destruction. Too far away towards my end. Too far away from where he has called me to be and who he's called me to be and surely his mercy has run out towards me.

[ 43 : 43 ] Surely now I've sunk down and the floods have surrounded me. Surely now all those waves and his billows have surpassed over me so much that there's no hope left for me.

Verses 5 and verse 6 Jonah uses his physical situation, his literal physical situation to help describe how it was he was feeling and what he's experiencing.

Verses 5 and 6 The waters closed in over me the deep surrounded me and weeds were wrapped about my head. The seaweed entangled him the darkness of the sea the depths were above him and Jonah is at an end of himself an end of himself and he is trapped completely trapped he feels trapped in his soul he feels trapped in his sin trapped in his disobedience and the end has come for poor Jonah but let's note that Jonah tried to outrun God but Jonah did not outrun God's mercy and God's grace despite Jonah's best attempts at escaping the Lord despite Jonah now sinking down and down and being close to death he did not outrun the mercy and the grace and the keeping and the love of God and again perhaps you are going through a time of darkness perhaps you read these verses and you can see yourself in Jonah's position and perhaps it's caused by your own sin and backsliding perhaps it's caused by something outwith your control completely outwith your control but yet you can still see and feel with Jonah the pain and the anguish the confusion and the darkness and you feel adrift and you feel alone how do you feel how did

Jonah feel brings us briefly onto the pain of distress as poor Jonah sinks down more and more into the depths how does he feel verses 3 and verses 5 and verses 6 he feels trapped again we see the imagery he feels burdened he feels trapped he feels sent away the waters closed in over me verse 5 verse 3 the flood surrounded me verse 6 he's at the roots of the mountains and the bars of the land the whole earth above him has closed over him and Jonah is being suffocated in darkness he is trapped he feels like he can't escape but also he feels like he's been abandoned like he's been cast away verse 4 then I said I am driven away from your sight I am driven away from your sight brothers and sisters those of us here and who have felt the discipline the loving caring discipline of the

Lord you will know what it is what Jonah is saying here when you feel far away from the Lord when you feel so far away from him when it feels as if your prayers aren't even as it were leaving the room if you can even pray at all that feeling of being trapped of being cast away that worry that you're somehow as it were no longer part of the family that worry that the Lord has he's just about done with you now you've had your run but you've just gone too far this time you've wandered too far away this time you've used up God's grace this time perhaps you wouldn't say it like that but your mind thinks that this time Lord this time I've gone too far this time Lord this time I've wandered too far away this time

[ 48 : 05 ] Lord this time I know I know I've been abandoned I know I've been left and I deserve and so on so on so on however you worded to yourself dear brothers dear sisters this is you just now you have no need for me to come here and tell you how you feel you know exactly how you feel if you feel just now like you are drowning in fear and drowning as it were in anxiety or if like Jonah you feel that you've been cast aside by the Lord because of your own sin there is hope in these verses there is hope in these verses and we close with the hope we find in these verses unlike Psalm 88 in some senses where we find no obvious hope there is hope in the Psalm we find no obvious hope in Jonah we find hope hope even in the middle of distress promise there is promise in distress we see that in verse 4 verse 4 when I said I am driven away from your sight yet yet

I shall again look upon your holy temple yes he feels abandoned yes he feels far away from God but yet yet I shall again look upon your holy temple even the middle of such distress Jonah still has hope and the image he uses here of looking upon the temple of God it's just a shorthand we could say the temple of course represented God's presence it represented God's closeness to the people in verse 4 the image is yes I feel far away and yes I perhaps have walked far away yes perhaps my circumstances have led me to be far from you but I know I will again be in your presence

I know I will again as it were see your temple I will again be close to you brothers and sisters do you have this hope when you find yourself at times wondering when you find yourself in the midst of pain and distress you must and I with you we must hold on to this hope and you say I have no ability you say I have no power to do this when times are hard when I feel far away when life is coming in over me I can't do it I can't hold on it's too hard when I worry about my own back sliding I can't deal with it when I face the pain and anxiety of health issues of family issues of personal issues medical issues whatever else I can't deal with it it's too much for me and you're right we can't deal with it

Jonah can't save himself Jonah can't swim his way to freedom there is no hope for him and we find ourselves in great distress and in great pain whether it's from sin or from situations outside our control we cannot help ourselves that's the wonder and the hope of the gospel verse 6 the second half of verse 6 we see that Jonah's efforts Jonah's hope is not based on him the first half of verse 6 we see the pain and everything else the second half of verse 6 yet you brought up my life from the pit O Lord my God again Jonah knows he can't help himself he is sinking down and down and from the depths he cries out and from the depths he is rescued as Jonah prays in verses 7 as Jonah prays as Jonah cries out to the

Lord as Jonah thinks of the Lord he can't help but praise the Lord and is thinking of him brothers and sisters you might feel this very moment you might feel and indeed you might be at this moment far from as it were the Lord you might feel and you might be and these things aren't always the same sometimes you can feel far from the Lord and not be far from the Lord for various reasons various reasons that's a discussion for a different day but this evening you might be far from the Lord and you might feel far from the Lord but here is the hope that Jonah had the same hope you and I can have this evening how do you dear suffering brother dear suffering sister you who feel far away from God how do you feel how do you become close to the Lord again how do you perhaps as a

[ 53 : 36 ] Christian that's backslidden even privately how do you get right as it were again with God do I have for you just now a 10 step program to follow this week to sort your life out do I come just now with a week's worth of hard study and a real intricate plan of how to sort your life out how to get back with God again no I have no words of personal wisdom for you what I do have what I can give you is this example of one who was far from the Lord in our chapter here this evening but yet he was taken back by the Lord this chapter we have here this evening a man who rebelled against God who was far from the Lord who sinned against the Lord a man who knew the Lord who loved the Lord who had served the

Lord and made a complete mess of his witness but yet yet a man the Lord did not abandon did not forget whatever your story whatever your story dear brothers and dear sisters whether you're facing as it were internal pain and anguish or whether you're feeling external pain whether your farness and your pain is caused by your own backsliding or it's caused by situations outside your control the answer is the same for us all this evening how do we get right with the Lord and the gospel message to Christians the good news to us as Christians it's not try and look better try and act better you will fail and you will fail and you will fail again dear wondering Christian how do you come back to the

Lord come back to him dear Christian who feels far away from the Lord how do you feel less far away from him come back to his word pray a few words whatever you can manage say it spend a few moments as much as you can in the word don't wait to feel better don't wait to improve your life before you come back to him that's a skewer looking at it you can't impress God enough that he'll take you back no if you know him if you love him he hasn't left you you might be under discipline yes but he hasn't left you Jonah cries out to the Lord cries out that the Lord would save him what happens in verse 10 the Lord spoke to the fish and vomits Jonah out upon the dry land

Jonah has made a mess of things as we all know but yet God will still make glorious use of Jonah and we'll see again next week the Lord well not next week but after the communion season in chapter 3 and chapter 4 even with the Lord giving Jonah a second chance Jonah is still a miserable man at times he is still one who sins and who gets it wrong but yet the Lord keeps him and that is the story of every Christian here this evening yes our backsliding at times is awful and yes at times we feel so far away from the Lord the truth is for all of our rebellion I say this to Christians say this to those who know the Lord for all our rebellion and all our nonsense and all our wandering away at times even though we are not faithful to our callings we're not faithful as it were to our covenants we made

God is faithful to his covenant God is faithful to his promises God is gracious and you have not gone beyond his love this evening you've not gone too far away from him this day this week this year these past few years dear brother dear sister come back and rely on him and on him alone he loses none of his precious people let's close with one last thought all that was said to those here this evening who know the Lord those who are Christians even those who have perhaps wandered away but are still known by and loved by the Lord again to those here who as of yet if you aren't and if you cannot say that you know him that you love him you are in much much worse danger much much worse danger bad grammar but a horrible unreal truth see the

[ 58 : 48 ] Christian who is backsliding may well sink down for a while and the Christian who is in sin may well sink down for a while and the Christian who is facing hard situations not caused by themselves hard personal situations and so on may sink down for a while but the truth is the Christian is always being held the Christian is always being held even at our lowest we are still being held we can never go below as it were the eternal hand of our loving God who sustains us and keeps us but dear friends if as of yet you do not know Jesus there is nothing stopping your sinking there is no hand as it were below you stopping your sinking there is no limit to which the Lord will keep you you'll keep sinking down and sinking down until your end and there is no joy if there is no joy in saying that up here

I assure you there is not it's not said to shock it's not said to upset it's said because it's a gospel truth Jonah's hope is based on the fact that God has still preserved him God preserves and keeps his people God rescues and keeps those who cry out to him if as of yet you have not cried out to the Lord this evening it is your chance to do it this is your opportunity to cry out to the Lord and yes you will fail and there's some fear some fear coming to the Lord because what if I make a mess of things what if I destroy my witness what if I am a rubbish Christian well the truth is it's better to be a rubbish Christian and know the Lord and spend eternity with him better to be a weak

Christian who is loved and kept by the Lord and a strong upstanding member of his community but go to hell with it it means nothing in the end follow follow Jonah follow this prophet who had the wisdom even in his misery to cry out to the Lord this once more is your chance not because of my preaching because of the word of the Lord in front of you this is once more your chance this evening the chance to come and cry out the Lord would save you that he would rescue you you would come and serve and come alongside us as brothers and sisters here it's our genuine prayer you come and know the Lord come and love the Lord and come and serve the Lord the Lord's help was seen in the last two chapters of this even though Jonah made a mess of things God uses God uses it and God still uses Jonah and God still works through Jonah that's a hope for

Christians here despite our waywardness despite our weakness the Lord still uses us and dear brother sister the Lord still loves and keeps his people for all time let's bow our heads in a word of prayer we come just now once more humbling ourselves down before you understanding that we have dealt this evening with some issues which are heavy in our hearts issues which are heavy for perhaps even some here we do pray Lord for any here this evening who may be listening in who know you and who love you but who through perhaps their own sin perhaps through life situations have gone far from you if not physically then mentally and spiritually Lord we ask you bring them back to yourself even this new week as we remind ourselves of the journey of Jonah that you kept him even as you went down to the depths that you kept him and you held him and you rescued him or we ask if that would be our story or there would be none here this evening who are still sinking we do pray just now for those who are sinking for those who as of yet do not have

Jesus as their saviour we ask Lord you would rescue them from that eternal sinking even this very evening who come and place their hope and trust in one and never lose them we praise you come to sing our final item of praise we do so hearts and minds set on praising you we pray once more Lord for the one who has led our worship this evening our sung worship Lord we thank you for him thank you the gifts Lord you've given your people to lead the praise in this place Lord help us to sing with words with hearts full of understanding as we sing the glorious words of salvation glorious words that you are a God who is merciful and who rescues your people let's call these things in and through and for Christ's name sake amen well as we said let's sing in

[ 64 : 09 ] Psalm 40 Scottish Psalter in Psalm 40 those glorious words of redemption those glorious words of God's rescue Psalm 40 I waited for the Lord my God and patiently did bear at length me did incline my voice and cry to hear he took me from a fearful pit and from the miry clay on a rock he set my feet establishing my way sing Psalm 40 verses 1 down to a double marked verse 5 to God's praise Amen and I waited for the Lord my God hath shandled with

His shouldn't expect to be íbete.

And all I want, He set my feet, Establish in my way.

And all I want, He set my feet, Make it, truly and rejoice, And will even rejoice that O love.

O blessed is the man whose path upon the glory I am, Respecting all the proud nor such,  
As thou art us unto us.

[ 67 : 28 ] O Lord, my God, O man, In other wonders thou hast come, Thy gracious songs to us were taught, Power of the star-born, In other night, God recipe, Father and me, And speak of thi■■■,

Then thy wound Be more than can Be under God.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, both you now and forevermore. Amen.