

Jonah 3

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[0 : 00] The Book of Jonah, Chapter 2.

I want to study with you tonight, Jonah's Prayer from the belly of the fish.

Now, I suppose that for most people, we come now to the heart of the Book of Jonah, a book which for many people means just one thing, that Jonah was swallowed by a whale.

And I'm sure that most of the youngsters here tonight will know the chorus of Jonah and the whale.

Well, as you've probably heard often enough, the first thing I have to say about that is this, that the Bible doesn't tell us that Jonah was swallowed by a whale at all.

He was swallowed by a great fish. There are many who think that the word great fish ought really to be translated as sea monster.

[1 : 50] And this miracle of Jonah being swallowed by the fish is probably the most famous of all the miracles of the Bible.

If it isn't the most famous, it is certainly the most ridiculed. You know that as far back as the 5th century, those who listened to Augustine telling this story listened to him with unbelieving laughter. Today, many equate belief in this miracle with obscurantism. Now, I suppose that some people would expect the likes of me in dealing with a chapter like this, first of all, to try to prove the reality of this miracle.

And perhaps they would want me to bring before them some recent evidence, perhaps from archaeological studies or perhaps marine biological studies investigations, which would prove conclusively that such a fish existed in this part of the world where Jonah lived in the world where Jonah lived.

And that was possible for a man to be swallowed by a fish to live within that fish for three days and three nights. Well, it is no part of my preaching to prove that, try to prove that to anybody.

[3 : 30] I take my stand quite simply on the fact that the Bible presents this as a fact. Believing in the authority and the inspiration of the Word of God and the infallibility of the Bible, I accept it because the Bible says it, not because I may read of the reality of this, may read of a similar miracle having taken place somewhere else or a similar event.

I'm not going to believe it because it happened in the Mediterranean or it happened in the South Pacific or anywhere else. The Bible says it. And for anyone who claims to be a conservative evangelical, that is enough for him if the Word of God says it.

Together with that, of course, we stand shoulder to shoulder with someone who knew the Bible better than any one of us and who believed the Old Testament and who lived in accordance with the principles of the Old Testament.

That was, of course, the Lord Jesus himself. And you can't be in better company than that. As we read last week or two weeks ago, he himself, when people in his generation asked him for a sign for proof that he was the Son of God, for proof that he would rise from the dead, I'll give you, he says, proof from the Old Testament, what happened to Jonah is a type of what is going to happen to me. He was three days and three nights in the belly of the fish. And so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the bowels of the earth, and then he will rise from the dead.

[5 : 08] Of course, there are other people who will say to you that this thing can't be proved anyway, can't even be believed. Because Jonah wasn't really three days and three nights in the belly of the fish, neither was Jesus three days and three nights in the grave.

Now, of course, there is a simple answer to that kind of objection. If someone dies on Thursday and is buried, say, on Monday, you very often speak in terms of that person being in the home for four days.

Now, in fact, he wasn't in the home for four days. As you and I understand four days, that's four days of 24 hours. But the way that we speak of days and nights, he was in the home for four days before he was buried.

So Jesus, if he died just a few hours before, say, the Jewish Saturday and rose in the very early hours of the Jewish Sabbath, then he was three days and three nights in the grave, as you and I speak of days and nights.

So was Jonah. He was in the belly of the fish for three days and three nights. But the point about Jonah and the fish is this, that what the Bible focuses attention on is not so much the miracle of his being swallowed by the fish and then after three days being vomited by the fish on dry land.

[6 : 48] That miracle, or these two miracles, his being swallowed and his being ejected, take up the space of two verses, four lines in the whole of the book.

What the book is devoted to, what the book is devoting attention to, focusing attention on, what it takes up its time with, is what Jonah did in the belly of the fish.

And what he did was this. He prayed, he cried to the Lord. And he tells us that the Lord heard his prayer.

Thomas Carlyle, when he read this book, said that he was so obsessed with what was going on inside the fish that I missed the great drama of what was going on inside Jonah.

You see, some people are obsessed with the idea of, now how could a man survive for this period of time in the fish? How could he breathe? How could he live?

[8 : 08] And so they advance arguments to prove that this could happen, and then others advance arguments to prove that it couldn't happen, that he would have been asphyxiated within minutes of being swallowed by the fish.

And all the time, the great drama that the Bible focused attention on is missed. People lose sight of this. This is not what the Bible deals with, not how he survived, but that he did.

But particularly, that during that period, he prayed. What we have in this chapter, really, is attention focused on Jonah in his relationship with God.

Now, before I come to deal with it more particularly, let us just for a minute remember what happened. The sailors, these heathen men, who through that supernatural storm and through Jonah's confession and Jonah's pointing them to the Lord God of Israel were converted.

Those heathen mariners had thrown this man in accord with his own command overboard. Throw me over, he says, otherwise the storm will not abate.

[9 : 28] So they threw him overboard and the sea was calm. Now, I don't know where these men went, but you can imagine just a minute they're landing somewhere, coming ashore and meeting their friends and telling them about it.

The tremendous, the fantastic experience it had since they had left Joppa. Tell you about this storm and this strange individual who was with him and what had happened to him and excusing themselves for this act of throwing a man overboard.

We had to do it. He told us to and we threw him overboard. As far as they were concerned, that was the end of the story. That was the end of Jonah. Well, it may have been the end of their story, but it wasn't the end of Jonah's story, nor was it the end of God's dealings with Jonah and ultimately with the great city of Nineveh.

You know that there are times that I'm sure that there are events in our own lives. We recount them, we recall them, we recount them, we tell the story and maybe as far as we understand it, that is the end of the story.

But it may not be the end of the story at all because behind all these events, God is working. And behind this great story, God was working.

[10 : 55] They threw Jonah overboard. That was it. But what they didn't know was that God had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah.

And this is the way in which God does work. In Jonah's case, it was awful being caught up in that storm. He was the reason for it. He was responsible for it.

And when they threw him overboard, that was terrible. Being thrown into the stormy seas, he didn't know what was going to happen. He'd just come in at his way to the Lord. He was brought to that position.

What he didn't know was that this fish was being prepared by God to swallow him up. Now, it may very well be that for Jonah, the fish was worse than the storm.

Maybe if you look at it yourself, being caught in a terrific storm is one thing. Being thrown overboard and swallowed by a sea monster is quite something else. That's probably even worse than the storm.

[11 : 57] And so it is in our own lives. David, for example, expressed this in Psalm 42. Deep calleth unto deep. There's a picture there of a man being caught in a storm.

The waves are crashing over him. And as one wave hits him and crashes over him, so he sees another one coming. Bigger, greater, worse than the last one.

Sea billows. crashing over. It's the same with Abraham. We read of Abraham, this great man of faith, whose life was really tested day, year after year.

God was trying his faith. Then the son for whom he had waited for so long was born, Isaac. And it seems as though for quite a number of years, Abraham had a period of relative peace.

And then we read this, then God tried Abraham. It's as though you find this man saying, well, haven't I had enough?

[13 : 02] But here's something worse than anything I've ever experienced. God is now asking me to sacrifice my son. Take Jesus. And I'm going to give you examples, illustrations of the principle I'm going to deal with in a minute.

Take Jesus. He who suffered in our room and in our stead. And as we follow the life of Jesus in the Gospels, his sufferings become deeper and deeper and deeper.

Read them in the book of Psalms. This is what you have. The sufferings run in channels which become deeper and deeper and deeper. And at last he cries out, God, thou hast forsaken me.

And then he gives himself death. Death. This was all that his enemies were bent on doing. All that the devil had in mind. Get rid of him.

Destroy him. Put him to death. Crucify him. We will not have this man to be king over us. And they had their way. Our Lord was put to death.

[14 : 08] That was the end of it. As far as they knew. But it wasn't. It was the beginning. It wasn't the end for David. It wasn't the end for Abraham.

It wasn't the end for our Lord. It was the means that God was using to effect his own purpose. Because through death, Christ destroyed him who had the power of death.

So it is with Jonah. The storm was bad. Being cast overboard was bad. Being swallowed by the fish was worse. God was using all these things to bring Jonah to the place where God wanted him to be.

And what was that place? The place where he was crying out of the depth of his own need. The place where he was brought face to face with God.

The place where he called on him, God, save me. thou art God. And the place out of which he was to make this confession to the Lord alone belongs salvation.

[15 : 22] And that is why I said that this whole chapter is taken up with Jonah and God. Jonah in prayer. Jonah in difficult circumstances.

God putting him there. And God coming to the fore as the God who saves. And the God who delivers. And I often feel that in reading biographies of men and women who relate their conversion experiences, reading testimonies and listening to testimonies, that this very often is one of the missing elements in a lot of testimonies.

That they don't focus attention sufficiently upon God and upon God's salvation. I remember reading many years ago *The Cross and the Switchblade*.

Maybe some of you have read it. Maybe some of the young people here have read it. David Wilkerson wasn't it? The same with that woman who wrote from Witchcraft to Christ, Dorothy Irvin. And I remember being struck by that in these books, how much time was given, speaking about the vice and the viciousness and the immorality and the drink scene and the drug scene from which they were supposedly delivered.

[16 : 44] The whole book seemed to be taken up with that. And there was solely just a tail end to God and his power and his mercy and his grace and his love.

Not so with Jonah. It is all about God. What God did for me, he said, out of the belly of the fish, it was there that I cried. And that's what the chapter page brings.

That's how it begins. Then Jonah prayed unto the Lord. And I want secondly to look with you at the circumstances out of which he was made to pray unto the Lord.

And then the nature of the prayer itself, he cried unto the Lord. The things that are referred, and you know this, there's hardly, I don't know if you could say that there's a petition in this prayer.

There isn't a single petition in it. It is all about how he had brought himself into these circumstances, the circumstances which he found himself, how God had laid hold of him, and what God did for him, and what God then persuaded him to do, to vow and to offer sacrifice of thanksgiving unto the Lord himself.

[17 : 59] Let us look then very briefly at this. Now, the circumstances which he found himself and in which he prayed were awful indeed.

I cried, he says, out of the belly of hell. That's a reference to the environment which he found himself inside this fish. It was the belly of hell. The words that you find in the Bible are the words Sheol and Hades, the abode of the dead.

He was in that kind of environment. And in that environment he goes on to say that I am in the midst of the sea, the floods have compassed me, thy billows and thy waves pass over me.

I am cast out of thy sight. The waters compassed me about. The depth closed me. The weeds were wrapped about my head. I went down to the bottom of the mountains.

The earth was about me forever. Now, these are descriptions of the circumstances in which he found himself.

[19 : 10] It's a scene of terror, a scene of fear. I suppose that one word is summoned up. Here's a man who is quite incapable of delivering himself.

He is unable to cope. He is gripped by a power greater than himself and he cannot break free from it. All these scapegoats are cut off.

Every door is clung shut. There is an awful finality about it all. I'm here and I can't save myself.

And I'm here, he says, secondly, because thou has brought me into these circumstances. Look at the emphasis on that. Thou has done it.

Thy hand has brought me here. Then there is thirdly the emphasis upon his own responsibility for this because, he says, of my afflictions.

[20 : 16] I am, by reason of mine affliction, I cried unto the Lord. I have brought this, he says, upon myself.

This chastisement, this situation, these circumstances are all because of my own wrongdoing, my own disobedience.

Because of that, he says, verse 7, my soul has fainted within me. And in verse 4, I am cast out of thy sight. Now, these are very, very strong terms.

My soul has fainted within me. I have folded inside. I have collapsed. He had no support out with himself, and he had absolutely nothing in himself, nothing to sustain him, nothing to comfort him, nothing to encourage him.

He just folded. He had nothing. And I am cast out of thy sight. He felt completely rejected, completely abandoned, helpless, hopeless, lonely, and consequently despondent.

[21 : 36] These were the circumstances in which this poor man found himself. Then he prayed unto the Lord.

And isn't it true that you and I have to find ourselves very often in similar circumstances before we will cry unto the Lord.

How often is it true of many people then they cried unto the Lord. Then and not till then.

You know some people poke fun, I have mentioned this already, some people poke fun at Christians, at people who turn to the Lord, maybe in middle age, or even in old age.

They forget of course that many young people turn to the Lord, but that's not convenient to see for their argument. And they can't very well poke fun at them for that reason, as yet they're young, but they will very often at people, you heard this, or most people in the islands in Lewis, perhaps they go away, they sow their wild oats, then after maybe when they're 40 or 50 to come back home, and they become religious.

[22 : 51] They turn to the church. They become members of the church. And I suppose that in a sense it is very true that with most of these people it is the case, that they didn't turn to the Lord till everything else had fallen in on them.

Till they had fallen in on themselves, they had nothing left in themselves, and nothing out with themselves. They were cast out, alone, despondent, dejected, life had turned sour, life had dried up.

The avenues in which they used to find enjoyment and peace and solace no longer gave them these things. Then they cried unto the Lord. Don't make excuses and say, oh well, I know that it was in middle age, I turned to the Lord, but there were reasons.

You just tell the reason. The reason was that you discovered that nothing else would matter but the Lord. Same with young people and with old.

You and I are brought into circumstances out of which we are made to call, made to cry, and made to pray unto the Lord.

[24 : 08] And the second thing is you notice the prayer, the way in which it is brought before us. then he says, I cried by reason of mine affliction.

It wasn't just that he said his prayers. He didn't go through the motions. There was something real about this. There was something sincere. He was involved. He was pouring out his heart.

He was poor. He was in great and desperate need. He cried to the Lord by reason of his affliction. You see, one word I think would sum this up. A crisis happened in this man's life. Something happened that made him cry to the Lord.

The Lord employed the storm and the fish to get him back into the habit of crying and praying to the Lord. Remember that Jonah had lost the habit.

[25 : 09] He ran away from the presence of the Lord, the place where the Lord reveals himself, the place where the Lord showed himself. And there are people who get out of the habit of prayer. You know that it is very easy to get out of the habit.

People get into a rut. Maybe that's something in the church not to have got into a rut. You get into a rut when it comes to church going. Your regular church goes. And then for one reason they stop. And each Sabbath that passes makes it more and the fear is well if I walk in through that door people are going to notice me. If I start sitting where I used to sit they're going to take stock and they say oh yes.

Remember when they used to come to church years and years ago. You see people get into a rut and it's difficult to get out of that rut. You've got to make the effort. People get out the habit for you to accept just to get you back into the habit of prayer.

This is what happens very often in conversion. When people are brought to the Lord initially something very often happens in their life. Something turns against them.

[26 : 33] Life turns sour. Perhaps there's an illness and a serious illness in their own life or in the life of someone who's near and dear to them. A death in the family circle.

How often God has used that as a means of bringing people to himself. Some trouble or other. Some failure in personal life. Some failure in their marriage union.

Some may adversity that they can't cope with. Some may turn their life completely upside down. This is the way that God deals with us.

He has to deal with us like that. So that we may turn prodigal. This is what happened to the prodigal son. He went off to the far country. Everything was fine. Everything was rosy.

As long as he had enough money and plenty of avenues along which he could go. Plenty of means through which he could get all the enjoyment that he wanted.

[27 : 34] Then something happened. It always happened. His money ran out. There's a famine in the land. He began to be in need. The crisis that brought him to himself.

And that made him say ultimately I will arise now and go to my father. This is what happened to Jonah. He was brought into a situation into a crisis situation out of which he had to cry to the Lord. His coldness his indifference vanished overnight. The disenfranchisement of his God became painfully aware to him. He was estranged.

He was all alone. And he cried to the Lord out of that situation. Now as I said before leaving this point coming to last one.

There may very well be people in this church tonight who are exactly like that. Who feel themselves hemmed in. Caught in a grip of a power with which they cannot cope.

[28 : 46] They want deliverance. They want freedom. They want to get out. But they can't. You know my friend God is persuading you to call upon himself.

and he's bringing you to the situation. Surely you recognize this. That after all you've tried there is help nowhere else and from no one else but in the Lord and from the Lord.

And this is what Jonah did. He cried unto the Lord. I remembered he said the Lord. Have you been made to remember him?

the Lord whom you have forgotten for so long? Have you been brought to the place now when you are remembering him? You're remembering him more than you've ever remembered him. You're wondering why your thoughts are going to the Lord. Why you are being made to cry to God in your distress in your own situation.

[29 : 49] Why? Because God had to bring you to that place. And so he cries to the Lord.

Ah, you say, ah, well, what a silly thing to do in some respects because after all, he was inside the fish. What's the point of crying to the Lord there?

Well, why not? You know, there are some people that are almost afraid to say that they've got problems because the answer inevitably will be, well, why don't you come to the Lord with your problem?

As though that was beneath their dignity, to come to the Lord. As though anyone should dare suggest to them that they should be brought to the situation when they would be made to come to the Lord.

Well, I'll put it another way to you. Can you think of anything better to do with your problem and with your situation tonight than to better person?

[30 : 57] Could you be engaged in a better exercise and crying to the Lord out of the depth of your need? Why should you be ashamed of admitting that you've reached the end of your own resources and that only the Lord can now help you?

That's what Jonah was. That's where God wanted him to be, in the place where he was in complete dependence upon himself. I cried unto the Lord and my prayer came unto him into his holy temple. And there's something very interesting when he says this. Then I said I will look again toward thy holy temple. Look at that again. He's admitting that this used to be his practice.

He forgot it. He let it slip. But now I'm doing it again. Again. Maybe you ought to be thankful tonight that God is bringing you back again to the place that you used to be in.

What is he doing? I will look again to thy holy temple. Now some people may say ah well here is a man you talk about ritual you talk about religion you talk about custom you talk about practice surely here's a picture a classic picture of a Jew who will not let his ritualism go nor his religion nor his custom of looking to the east when he prayed are you suggesting to me that Jonah was looking for a comfortable position inside the fish which he was sure he was looking to the east of course it isn't that is not what it means at all it means that he was looking and longing for the revelation of God that's what the temple was it was the place where God revealed himself the place where God spoke to people the place where God showed his mercy his love his forgiveness and this is what he said [33 : 10] I will look away again for that have you stopped asking for forgiveness have you stopped asking for mercy have you stopped asking for the favor of God for the voice of God to be heard in your life have you stopped asking for the revelation of his love and of his grace and of his goodness oh my friend don't don't stop but begin as you've never begun before looking and longing and wanting the revelation of God and his mercy and his grace to you and then we have this finally this picture we have here drawn for us by Jonah himself of God's answer to his prayer they say observe lying vanities forget their own mercy

I will sacrifice unto thee with the voice of thanksgiving I will pay that that I have vowed salvation is of the Lord there are three lessons that Jonah here learned particularly he learned the folly of disobedience he learned the value of thanking God and he learned particularly that salvation is all of God he learned the vanity the folly of disobedience they that observe lying vanities forsake their own mercy well if I may put it like this those who cling to things that are worthless forget that there is mercy with God no my friend this is true of us all we all have to learn this lesson that none of us lives for himself and none of us lives unto himself we are to learn not to bring idolatry into our lives what is idolatry what is lying vanity anything that takes you away from

God anything that encourages you to run away from God that's what Jonah did Jonah run away from God why because he was so self willed he wanted his own way that was why he wouldn't submit to God's way so he ran away and he learned this the folly of running away from God the folly of turning your back upon the mercy of God he points the finger at himself and he says this I got exactly what I deserve because I run away from the Lord what about you here tonight are you running away from the Lord well if you are my friend you get in your life exactly what you deserve if the Lord isn't in your life tonight if the voice of the Lord isn't speaking to you if his mercy and his love and his grace are precious to you why not because you are running away from it that's the first lesson that

Jonah learned that you cannot cater for your own needs if you bow down to anything other than him you are losing contact with the mercy and the grace and the love of God are you the second lesson he learned the value of true gratitude I will sacrifice unto thee with the voice of thanks giving I will pay that that I have vowed now this is one of the problems that I see with this prayer is Jonah was his faith now so strong that he knew that he would be delivered out of the fish's belly I will sacrifice unto thee with the voice of thanksgiving I will pay that that I have out well maybe one answer to that question is this Jonah is here telling us what happened while he was inside the fish he is recounting his experience he is telling it

God I was cast over but God took me down to the depths I was swallowed by this fish and inside that fish I was made to cry and God saved me and I will sacrifice unto the Lord with the voice of thanksgiving I will pay that that I have vowed thanking God for deliverances thanking God for his mercy thanking God for his great goodness and bringing him alive out of that fish have you learned the value of such a prayer of thanksgiving to sentiment here this morning again just now within the service that next Thursday a day set apart for harvest thanksgiving when people are encouraged to come and worship and express their thanks to

[39 : 00] God for his goodness to them do you feel constrained to do that yourself for God's goodness to you as an individual do you know what it is to sing with the psalmist who sang here tonight I love the Lord because my voice and prayers he did hear I while I live will cry to him who bowed to me his ears you see there's a person who was thanking God for his great goodness has he saved you from a life of sin has he brought you to himself has he convinced you of the wrongness of a Christless life the folly of a Christless life has he enabled you to turn your back upon sin are you being constrained to come to do you see things as you have never seen them before thank the Lord for that great goodness in your life

I will pay that that I have vowed unto the Lord now I mentioned this last week and I just leave it at this there are two situations which you can make a vow if you have problems if you have difficulties trials you say well if God delivers me out of this I will do this and I will do that and very often God does deliver people like that but then they go and they forget the very things that they vow to the Lord when they are delivered they forget the promise oh yes I have seen that so often and you have seen it especially connection with illness what would people not do and what would there not be if only and then God does help them and they go away and they forget what he's done but here Ramana didn't I will pay that that

I have vowed we're not told what he vowed but I think we're on safe ground to assume this that Jonah vowed to the Lord well if I'm delivered never again will I turn my back upon the path of obedience never again will I say to thee I will not go and I will not do I'm sure that he vowed these things to the Lord I will go and he went with tremendous consequences for himself and for Nineveh what about you what vows have you made to the Lord what promise have you done have he given he has been good to you he has delivered you he has saved you he has helped you he could have forgotten you as you forgot him over the years he could have abandoned you as you abandoned him but he didn't do it and he's brought you here yet again what vows are you vowing to the Lord tonight will you vow to him to commit your way to him will you vow to be obedient to the Lord will you vow not to disregard his voice and not to disobey his command and the third thing he learned was this salvation is of the Lord God alone saved you know that I think that this is Jonah at his best salvation is of the Lord I think this is man at his best when he comes to say with the psalmist not unto us Lord not unto us but unto thee be all the glory when he says with Jeremiah if any man will glory let him glory in the Lord when he says with Paul quoting Jeremiah if any man will glory in the Lord a text in which he bases the first few chapters I believe of 1st Corinthians you know it's a wonderful thing to be brought to that place where God is everything and we are nothing God is all and we are nothing oh it's difficult it is difficult nothing but the grace of God will bring any man to say salvation is of the Lord with all the glory is given to God in his power and God in his grace man can rise no higher and in heaven tonight that is the theme of the song of the redeemed unto him who loved us and washed us from our sins in his own blood unto him be glory dominion and power world without end salvation is of the Lord have you learned that lesson that is all of grace to

[44 : 21] God be the glory great things he has done and here is Jonah now this new man ejected on dry land the Lord spake unto the fish and it vomited out Jonah upon the dry land where well we're not told I would like to think that he vomited out on Joppa that he took him back to the place

that he left because we read in chapter one that the mariners during the storm rode hard to bring the ship to land they hadn't gone very far when the that's what Jonah was vomited by the fish where he left and that's where you and I have to go back we've got to go back if it be that there's a Christian here tonight on the path of back sliding disobedience my friend you've got to go back where you went wrong you've got to go back to the beginning like the pilgrimage

John Bunyan Pilgrance progress went back to the book in which I believe probably a reference to the Bible you've got to go back to where you lost your your your vigor you lost your spiritual vitality your spiritual vision go back whatever it is wherever it is you go back there and here Jonah this new man with his hope and his trust in the Lord and this is his motto God alone saves do you know that that no one could save you but God no one could do for you what has been done but the Lord is that your motto what a motto that would be for each one of us night leaving this church going out into that hostile world and facing it in that confidence I will thank the

Lord I will pay my vow to him because he alone saves let us pray bless to us thy truth and help us Lord to believe that thou art our God oh do thou draw us in faith to thyself and help us to know thee as the God who saves us and may we anew tonight recognize our indebtedness to thee and may we by grace be prepared to cast our all upon thee believing that thou will do for us exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think for Jesus sake Amen p God who we do Bã?!" Thank you.