

Bellowing From The Belly

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Preacher: Rev. Murdo M Campbell

[0 : 0 0] Well, if we could, this evening, for a short while, if we could turn back to that portion of Scripture that we read.

And with the Lord's help, we'll look at Jonah chapter 2. Jonah chapter 2, and we'll just read it again at the beginning. 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 shell I cried, and you heard my voice.

Whenever I read this chapter, I always think that if Jonah had written one of the Psalms, or if Jonah had a Psalm attributed to him, or even if we asked Jonah, Jonah, what's your favourite Psalm?

I would like to think that his favourite Psalm would have been the Psalm we were just singing. Psalm 130. Because, as you know, Psalm 130, it's a cry from out of the depths.

And then it ends in proclaiming that salvation is from the Lord. That's what we sang there. Plenteous redemption is ever found with him. And you know, like Jonah, the Psalmist, he directs his plea to the Lord.

[1 : 2 5] Like Jonah here in the depths, the Psalmist says, Lord, from the depths, to thee I cried. My voice, Lord, do thou hear. Unto my supplication's voice, give an attentive ear.

But you know, unlike the Psalmist, where his depths were spiritual, the depths that Jonah reached were both spiritual and physical. Because last time when we left Jonah, at the close of chapter 1, we saw that a big fish was closing its mouth over Jonah.

And Jonah, you'll remember, as we've said before, he was a disobedient disciple. He was running away from the Lord, and he was running from the call that the Lord had put upon his life. But the Lord, as we know, he stopped Jonah in his tracks, and in order to preserve the lives of those who were on the ship with him going to Tarshish, Jonah was hurled overboard.

He was cast into the fierce storm of the Mediterranean Sea. And we're told at the end of chapter 1, we're told in verse 15, And so they picked up Jonah, hurled him into the sea, and the sea ceased from its raging.

Then the men feared the Lord exceedingly, and they offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made vows. 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.

[2 : 4 3] And now as we begin chapter 2, we're given this understanding of what went on inside the belly of the fish. And as you would expect, Jonah was crying to the Lord from out of the depths.

Jonah was, in many ways, he was bellowing from the belly of the big fish. That's what he was doing. He was bellowing from the belly of the big fish. And as we consider Jonah's belly from the belly, I want us to just draw attention to four things in this short chapter.

Four things. Jonah's complication, Jonah's cry, Jonah's confession, and Jonah's Christ. Jonah's complication, Jonah's cry, Jonah's confession, and Jonah's Christ.

So let's look first of all at Jonah's complication. Jonah's complication in verse 1. Then Jonah prayed to the Lord his God from the belly of the fish.

Jonah's complication first came to light when the Lord stopped Jonah in his tracks. Everything seemed to be going so well for Jonah. The Lord had called Jonah to go to Nineveh to preach this message of repentance.

[3 : 58] But even though, as we saw in chapter 1, even though Jonah had refused, and he went in the completely opposite direction, the Lord was still gracious with him, and the Lord was still patient with him.

You would have thought that the Lord would have immediately put an obstacle in Jonah's path to stop him going to Joppa and even getting on the ship going to Tarshish. But when Jonah defied the word of God, he, as we said before, he misread and he misused the Lord's providence.

Because providence had it that Jonah made it to Joppa. Providence had it that there was a ship available for Jonah going to Tarshish. Providence had it that when Jonah put his hand into his pocket, there was the right amount of money to pay the fare and board the ship going to Tarshish.

For Jonah providence seemed to be saying that it's okay to be a disobedient disciple. But when is it ever okay to be a disobedient disciple?

When is it ever okay to disobey the word of God and live and do as we please? And you know, my friend, what we ought to learn from Jonah is that the Lord's providence may allow us to go so far, but the Lord's patience will not.

[5 : 14] The Lord's providence may allow us to go so far, but the Lord's patience will not. Jonah had tested the Lord's providence and Jonah had tried the Lord's patience.

But now both the Lord's providence and patience, they left Jonah bellowing from the belly of a big fish. Jonah had thought that his complication was that he had to go to Nineveh to preach a message of repentance.

But Jonah's complication only got bigger when he disobeyed the Lord and it brought him into the depths. And you know, my friend, let's never think that it's okay to be a disobedient disciple.

Let's never think that it's okay to disobey what the word of God is telling us and live and do as we please. Because like Jonah, when we test the Lord's providence and when we try the Lord's patience, our complications will only get bigger.

And the Lord, he will bring us, just like Jonah, into the depths so that we realise that we've got no one else to turn to and that the prayer of our heart becomes, in many ways, the prayer of Jonah in Psalm 130.

[6 : 26] Lord, from the depths to thee I cry. My voice, Lord, do thou hear. But you know, when we consider Jonah's complication of being swallowed by this big fish and remaining in its belly for three days and three nights.

You know, Jonah's complication here, it defies all human logic. Because down throughout the centuries, people have tried to explain how it was humanly possible for Jonah to be swallowed by a big fish or a whale and then survive in its belly for three days.

Some have argued that Jonah couldn't actually have gone into the stomach of the big fish because the stomach acid would have, well, it would have killed him. And with that, some have concluded that Jonah, when he was swallowed by the fish, he went down the wrong way and he ended up in the lung.

And if he was in the lung of the big fish, well, he would have had oxygen to breathe and he would have survived for three days. But that doesn't explain why the big fish vomited Jonah out onto the dry land.

There's all these scenarios, all these thoughts as to what happened when Jonah was in the belly of the fish. But, you know, even if we say that Jonah was in the lung of the fish and not the belly, then we're actually denying what Scripture says.

[7 : 43] Scripture says that he was in the belly and he was vomited out after three days and three nights. And, you know, many people, they try to come up with an explanation as to how it was humanly possible for Jonah to be swallowed by a big fish.

And yet we forget so often that we worship the God of the impossible. The Bible asks us, is anything too hard for the Lord?

And Jesus reminds us, what is impossible with men is possible with God. And, you know, why don't we try to explain the inexplicable or inexplicable?

We're actually trying to put God into our little box. We're trying to understand something that's far beyond our knowledge or our comprehension. But, my friend, tonight we worship the God of the impossible.

We worship the God who made this world out of nothing. Nothing. He made it all by the word of his power in the space of six days and all very good.

[8 : 45] We worship the God who created us in his own image and likeness. And the Bible reminds us that we're fearfully and wonderfully made. We worship the God who flooded the world in judgment.

We worship the God who allowed barren women to give birth. We worship the God who caused fire and brimstone to fall from heaven. We worship the God who parted the Red Sea, who made water flow from a rock, who fed people with manna from heaven.

We worship the God who led his people just by a cloud. The God who made the sun stand still on the day of battle. We worship the God who made the walls of Jericho fall by the sound of a trumpet.

We worship the God who gave Samson strength just through his hair. We worship the God who gave Solomon wisdom just because he asked for it. And we worship the God who stopped the mouths of lions when Daniel was in the den.

That's, and you know, that's only what happened in the Old Testament. Because when the God of the impossible stepped onto the stage of our world, he came via a virgin birth.

[9 : 52] And in his life he performed miracles by healing the sick, calming storms, forgiving sin, casting out demons, and raising the dead. And you know, when you actually look at the Bible, we worship the God of the impossible, but even more so when it comes to Jonah bellowing in the belly of the big fish.

we don't need to give a human explanation for it. Because no human explanation can be given for a divine demonstration. No human explanation can be given for a divine demonstration.

We worship the God of the impossible. And you know, I look at myself and my own salvation, and I used to think, impossible. You look at yourself, maybe you think, it was impossible for me to be converted.

But we worship the God who is, the God who does the impossible. And he does, he's able to do in us and for us exceedingly abundantly above all, more than we could ask or even think.

And that was certainly true of Jonah. Jonah's complication was all in the hands of the God who does the impossible. But in Jonah's prayer we not only see Jonah's complication, we secondly see Jonah's cry.

[11 : 12] Jonah's complication and then Jonah's cry. We're told in verse 2, he says that, Jonah says, 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 deep, into the heart of the seas and the flood surrounded me. All your waves and your billows, they passed over me. You know, just like Psalm 130, Jonah's cry from out of the depths, it was directed solely to the Lord.

It was directed to the covenant God of his people. That's what we're told and emphasised in verse 1. Jonah prayed to the Lord, his God. Jonah prayed to his covenant making and covenant keeping God.

Jonah prayed to the Lord, the one who keeps covenant. Because that's what the title means. The title Lord means the one who keeps covenant. And that's who Jonah was praying to.

He's praying to the Lord, his God. And Jonah directs his prayer to the Lord because Jonah knows that despite his disobedience and despite his unfaithfulness, he knows that the Lord will remain faithful.

[12 : 28] That's the covenant promise. There's nothing we can do to make him love us any more than he already does. And there's nothing we can do to make him love us any less.

He is the one who keeps covenant. And his covenant promise, as we know, it's binding to a thousand generations. And even though we faint and fail, and even though we disobey and even as Jonah did, deserve the Lord, and even though we break our promises and fail to uphold the covenant, the guarantee is that he will remain faithful.

He will remain constant. He will continue to uphold his covenant promises with his people. And you know, that's where Jonah's hope and assurance lay when he was in the belly of the fish.

His hope and assurance was in the covenant making and covenant keeping God. Jonah knew that even though he was plunged into the depths and darkness of despair, he knew that the Lord was still there and that he was able to cry out to him.

And my friend, let's never forget that we have the same covenant God as Jonah. He hasn't changed. He's still the Lord, the one who keeps covenant.

[13 : 46] And he's faithful to his covenant promises. He's faithful to his covenant people, despite our unfaithfulness, and even more so, despite our unworthiness. And you know, our hope and assurance, your hope and assurance tonight, is that when you're plunged into the depths of darkness and despair, when you're plunged into those depths, whether it's because of sin or sorrow or sickness, your hope and assurance is that you're not left on your own.

You have access to call upon the name of the Lord. And as Jonah knew there and then, he answers. He will answer. He will hear my voice.

And you know, despite his disobedience to the Lord, even his denial of the Lord, even his desertion of the Lord's call upon his life, Jonah knew that there's no depth he could sink to.

There's no distance he could run from the Lord. There's no disobedience limit with the Lord. Jonah knew that even if he got himself into such a mess, the door was never shut to him.

Access to the Lord was always open and repentance was always possible. My friend, it's because of the Lord's covenant that Jonah cried to the Lord.

[15 : 09] And that's the hope and assurance we have. And that's what we have to take from this. Because when we fall into sin or when we experience sorrow or even when we're faced with sickness, there are times that we can almost turn away from the Lord in these situations, even distance ourselves from him.

We can feel shame because of our sin. We can feel sadness because of our sorrow. We can even have selfishness because of our own sickness. But when we're in the depths and darkness of despair, the only one who can actually understand what we're going through is the Lord.

And the only one who promises to be with us throughout everything is the Lord. Because the wonderful thing is he knows us, he made us, and he's with us wherever we go.

He knows us, he made us, and he's with us wherever we go. That's why David could say in Psalm 139, which we were singing earlier, from thy spirit whither shall I go or from thy presence fly, ascend thy heaven, lo thou art there, there if in hell I lie.

Jonah knew, and we also know that the Lord is with us, he's made us, and he's with us wherever we go. Ascend thy heaven, lo thou art there, there if in hell I lie.

[16 : 35] And that's actually what Jonah is saying here when he prays in verse 2. He says, Out of the belly of Sheol I cried. Sheol is the grave, it's the place of the dead.

And that's where Jonah felt he was. He thought he was finished. He felt he was in the depths and the darkness of the grave. But even there, in the depths and darkness of the grave, Jonah had the hope and assurance that the Lord was with him and the Lord was hearing his cry.

And you know, it was because of Jonah's complication and Jonah's cry that there came Jonah's confession. That's what we see thirdly, Jonah's confession. So Jonah's complication, Jonah's cry, and thirdly, Jonah's confession.

Jonah's confession. Look at verse 4. Then I said, I am driven away from your sight, yet I shall look again upon your holy temple. The waters closed in over me to take my life.

The deep surrounded me, weeds were wrapped around 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.

[17 : 50] 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. You know, we mentioned earlier that if Jonah had written one of the Psalms, or if one of the Psalms had been attributed to Jonah, or even if Jonah had a favourite psalm, it would have been the well-known psalm of Psalm 130.

But as you can see from these verses, of Jonah's prayer, Jonah's language here is very poetic. It's very poetic, just like the Psalms are.

In fact, it was the late John L. Mackay, he highlights in his commentary that Jonah's poetic references, they are actually all references from the Psalms.

I didn't look all the references up, but I'll take his word for it. Jonah's poetic references are all references from the Psalms. And of course, many of the Psalms did prayer.

[19 : 02] Calvin said that the Psalms, they give to us the anatomy of all parts of the soul. But you know, I love what John L. Mackay says about Jonah's prayer. He says, And you know, I believe that John L. Mackay, he made that comment about Jonah, and he made it from his own experience.

Because having had the privilege of being taught Old Testament and Hebrew under John L., there's one thing that I'll never forget about his classes, and that's his prayers.

His prayers were just something else. Because like Jonah, his prayers, they were the natural utterance of someone well-versed in Scripture. And you know, his prayer even before the morning lecture, he'd always come in first thing, put down his folder and pray.

And his prayer before the morning lecture, it was enough to just go home with. In fact, there was one morning just after he had prayed, before he opened his folder, I had to say to him, How did you learn to pray like that?

And you were never meant to address the professors like that. But anyway, John L., he stopped and he explained that he had read the larger catechism every day. He read it every morning and by reading the larger catechism it gave to him instruction and insight into praying according to Scripture.

[20 : 44] And you know, we will do well to learn from such experience. To learn to pray with Scripture and to pray according to Scripture.

We'll do well as someone who is well-versed and saturated in Scripture. we will do well to have a natural utterance of someone who is well-versed in Scripture.

But you know, a warning which we must always be conscious of is that even though Jonah could pray Scriptural prayers, he didn't practice what he prayed.

And that's something that really struck me. He didn't practice what he prayed. Even though Jonah knew the Word of God, could quote the Word of God, could pray the Word of God, Jonah certainly wasn't living according to the Word of God.

And you know, I speak to myself when I say this, we can be the same. We can know the Bible, we can quote the Bible, we can pray the Bible, but not live according to the Bible.

[21 : 47] And that's one thing that must characterise the Lord's people, that we live according to the Bible. My friend, even though Jonah is an encouragement to pray Scripturally, he's also a warning to live spiritually.

Even though he's an encouragement to live, to pray Spiritually, to pray Scripturally, he's a warning to live spiritually. We must practice what we pray. We must practice what we pray.

And that's what Jonah came to discover in the depths of the sea because Jonah's confession at the end of verse 9, at the end of his prayer, his confession is salvation belongs to the Lord.

Salvation belongs to the Lord. And as soon as Jonah has made this confession, that's what causes the big fish to vomit him out. Because for long enough, Jonah had denied that salvation belonged to the Lord.

Jonah had thought that the people of Nineveh, that they were completely unworthy of salvation and that they didn't deserve the Lord's salvation. But when he was in the ship with those ungodly sailors who were converted and then he was bellowing in the belly of the big fish, Jonah came to make this confession that salvation, yes, salvation, it belongs to the Lord.

[23 : 08] And you know, my friend, it was in the depths that Jonah came to discover that salvation is not up to him. It's not his choice. It's not his doing. It's not even his plan.

It belongs to the Lord. It belongs to the Lord. And you know, tying Psalm 130 in with Jonah, it begins in the depths, crying to the Lord.

It ends, just like Jonah's prayer, confessing that salvation belongs to the Lord. Plenteous redemption is ever found with him. salvation belongs to the Lord.

And Jonah's confession shows us that he was brought into the depths in order to be taught. And you know, that's often where the Christian's classroom is to be found.

The Christian's classroom is often not on the mountaintop but in the valley because it's in the depths of the valley that we're tested and taught. It's in the depths of the valley that we're shaped and moulded.

[24 : 12] It's even in the depths of the valley that we're made to realise that salvation belongs to the Lord. But you know, looking at Jonah's experience of bellowing from the belly of the big fish, it's by looking at his experience that we're enabled to see Jonah's Christ.

That's what I want us to consider lastly and very briefly. Jonah's Christ. So Jonah's complication, Jonah's cry, Jonah's confession, and lastly, Jonah's Christ.

Jonah's Christ. Look at verse 10. The Lord spoke to the fish and had vomited Jonah out upon the dry land. As soon as Jonah made the confession that salvation belongs to the Lord, the big fish put him out.

But as we said before, the story of Jonah isn't just about this man who ran away from God and this man who was swallowed by a big fish. We said before that Jonah should be seen as a type of Christ.

And the book of Jonah should make us realise the preciousness of the gospel. Because the story of Jonah is actually all about Jesus. And the message of the gospel is presented to us, even in the book of Jonah.

[25 : 30] But as I said before, there's one comparison between Jonah and Jesus that fascinates me. And it's the direction that they both went. The direction that they both went.

Because in chapter 1, as we saw before, we're told that Jonah, he went down to Joppa. And when he boarded the ship, he went down into the hold. And then when the sailors came to throw some cargo overboard, Jonah was down in the inner part of the ship.

So Jonah's movement, we're told in chapter 1, was down, down, down. He was down, down, down until he was down in the belly of the fish. And as we said before, that was the same movement as Jesus.

Jesus' movement was down, down, down. From the crown to the cradle to the cross. Jesus' movement, down, down, down. From glory to Golgotha to the grave.

Always downwards. And what's amazing is that Jesus compared his death and burial to that of Jonah. Jesus says, 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.

[26 : 42] But when you come to chapter 2, Jonah isn't going down, down, down. He starts going up, up, up. It was after three days and three nights that Jonah was delivered from the belly of Sheol.

Which as we said, it's from verse 2. We said earlier that Sheol is the grave. Sheol is the place of the dead. You could even say that when Jonah was vomited out onto the dry land, he was resurrected from the grave.

He was brought from death to life. And as I know what happened to our greater than Jonah, Jesus. Jesus went down, down, down into the depths of the earth.

He went from glory to Golgotha to the grave. But on that first Lord's Day morning, Jesus was brought up, up, up.

Our Jesus, as we know, he was resurrected from the grave and he was brought from death to life. Death couldn't hold him, the grave couldn't keep him, and the angels proclaimed about him, he is not here for he is risen.

[27 : 54] And you know, Paul reminds us, God has highly exalted him and he's given to him a name that is above every other name so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, every tongue will confess that he is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

You know, Jonah, even though he was a disobedient disciple, he's a type of Christ. And the story of Jonah is ultimately about Jesus and the gospel.

Jonah went down, down, down, down, down, and up, up, up. Jesus went down, down, down, and up, up, up. And now, as we mentioned on the Lord's day, he is seated at the Lord's right hand making intercession for us.

It's a wonderful story, the story of Jonah. Jonah's complication, Jonah's cry, Jonah's confession, and Jonah's Christ. Well, may the Lord bless these thoughts to us. Let us pray.

O Lord, our gracious God, we give thanks to Thee that Thou art one who deals with us so graciously, and so patiently, and even so lovingly.

[29 : 08] And we thank Thee, Lord, that even when we faint and fail, and stray and wonder like Jonah, that Thou art the one who brings us back. And Lord, that if we are drifting this evening, that Thou wouldst draw us to Thyself.

O Lord, that we would know the promise that when we draw nigh unto God, Thou art the one who shall draw nigh unto us. Help us, we pray, to cry to Thee, even in the depths, knowing and being assured of the fact that Thou art the one who will hear us, and who will answer us, and who will forgive us, because plenteous redemption is ever found with Thee.

O Lord, watch over us, we pray. Bless us in our walk with Thee. Help us to stay close to Thee, and to ever keep our eyes firmly fixed upon Jesus, to know Him and to love Him all the days of our life as the author and the finisher of our faith.

Lord, bless us together, we pray. Watch over us and guard us, and protect our minds and our hearts, for we ask it in Jesus' name and for His sake. Amen.

Amen. We're going to bring our service to a conclusion by singing the words of Psalm 69. Psalm 69 in the Scottish Salta.

[30 : 35] Psalm 69, we're singing from verse 14 down to the verse marked 20. And Psalm 69, as you know, it's a messianic psalm, a psalm that speaks very clearly about Jesus.

And especially in his latter moments before he dies, it's a psalm that portrays to us very clearly what happened at the cross. And how Jesus, and even when you're singing this psalm, we shouldn't view it as the psalmist speaking, but as Jesus speaking himself.

And that he's describing going down, down, down, the waters coming over him, just like Jonah's experience of the waters coming over him. Psalm 69 in verse 14.

Deliver me out of the mire, from sinking do me keep. Free me from those that do me hate, and from the waters deep. Let not the flood on me prevail, whose water overflows, nor deep me swallow, nor the pit, her mouth upon me close.

And we'll sing down to the verse marked 20 of Psalm 69 to God's praise. Deliver me out of the mire, from sinking do me keep.

[32 : 02] Free me from those that do me hate, and from the waters deep.

Let not the flood on me prevail, whose water overflows, nor deep me swallow, nor the pit, nor the pit upon me close.

Hear me, O Lord, because thy love and kindness is most good.

Turn unto me according to thy mercy, thy mercy's multitude.

Nor from thy servant, and hide thy face, my troubles soon not end.

[33 : 54] Draw near my soul, and death within me, take me from my force, my force defend.

To thee is my reproach, well known, my shame and my distress.

Grace, does that my name never satisfy, be, and all before thy face.

Reproach hath broke my heart, my heart, I'm full of grief, I look for one to pity me, but none thy fault, comfort of thy none.

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