

Jonah 2

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[0 : 00] Well, people often talk about life-changing experiences, don't they? Some people, young people leave school, head off from university, head off around the world to have a life-changing experience.

Some of us may have had life-changing experiences staying a bit closer to home. I found one particular website that had 25 top tips for changing your life. Number one was travel the world.

That's perhaps not a great piece of advice for some of us.

Number two is change your job. Some might like to change their jobs, but it's not that easy. Number three was sell your house. I guess that means you have to have a house in the first place.

And it certainly will change your life to sell your house, but maybe not for the better. The rest of the list was pretty similar. Number 17, I was intrigued to see, was have a baby. Well, that will change your life. That is true. May not be an option for everyone.

Number 19, slightly less radical, watch less television. Of course, that presupposes you're watching a lot to begin with. Life-changing experiences might be something lots of people want, but they can be hard to come by, can't they?

[1 : 07] Jonah, in fact, didn't want a life-changing experience, and yet he got one. He didn't have to travel to get it, although, in fact, he was travelling. He didn't have to change his job to get it, although he did want to change his job.

In fact, his job doesn't change, as we'll see next week in chapter 3. In fact, nothing Jonah did changed his life. This is what God did that changed his life. But we can see the big change. Chapter 1, he wanted to flee from the presence of the Lord.

Now look down at the end of the reading today. Chapter 2, verse 9. What does Jonah say? I, with the voice of thanksgiving, will sacrifice to you what I have vowed I will pay.

Having been wanting to get out of commitment completely, now he wants to be completely committed to the Lord. That's the effect this life-changing experience had on him. So what was it? What changed?

We'll look at two parts of it here. First of all, what Jonah experienced. And secondly, what Jonah concluded. What Jonah experienced and what Jonah concluded.

[2 : 14] There are several stages to what he experienced. The first part of his experience was he felt helplessness. Helplessness. He felt his own helplessness. You see that in verse 3.

I called out to the Lord, out of my distress. It must have been quite some distress, wasn't it? Thrown overboard, out of a boat, in the midst of a storm.

Sinking through the waters. And suddenly a big fish comes and gobbles him up, or swallows him down. And there he is, crying out from the belly of the whale. Verse 3 continues.

Verse 2 continues. Out of the belly of Sheol I cried. Sheol is a Hebrew word for the place where the dead lay awaiting God's judgment.

The place of the unrighteous dead will await God's judgment. And that's where Jonah feels he is. Trapped in the belly of this fish, having thought he was drowning. He feels he's in the place of the dead awaiting God's judgment.

[3 : 14] He feels his own helplessness. And you can sense that helplessness in his description in verse 5 of the whole experience of drowning. The waters closed in over me to take my life.

The deep surrounded me. Weeds were wrapped about my head. At the roots of the mountains I went down. To the land whose bars closed upon me forever. He felt helpless.

He felt helpless. He felt like life was coming to an end. And it's often the way isn't it? It's the moments of helplessness. When we cry out to God. We can go for weeks, months even.

Without thinking about God. And then suddenly something happens. I remember a man in my last church. Almost a year ago now. He turned up. First time.

He was my age approximately. In his early 40s. And I said, you know, what's brought you here? He said, well my mother said I should come back to church. Well that's good. He's still listening to his mother in his 40s.

[4 : 13] That's a good example for me. And he explained what happened. He was about to be made redundant. He was under threat of disciplinary proceedings at work. Which would actually ruin his whole career.

He wouldn't be able to get another job in the financial sector if that happened. He was hugely in debt. He was in distress. And that was what God had used to finally bring him back. To finally get him calling out. That's what Jonah experienced. He experienced his own helplessness. But in the midst of that helplessness. He also had this moment of spiritual awakening. As he felt God's hand. That's the second thing. He felt his own helplessness. And secondly, he felt God's hand. He suddenly realised that everything that was happening to him. Was not a coincidence.

It was not just fate. But it was God doing something. You see that if you look at verse. If you look back over the page. Or not over the page in your book perhaps. It is in mine.

[5 : 10] To verse 15 of chapter 1. There we read that the sailors. Picked up Jonah. And hurled him into the sea. If you look down to chapter 2 verse 3.

How does Jonah describe his experience there? For you Lord. Cast me into the deep. Jonah realises it was the Lord who was doing all this.

It was the Lord who sent the storm. It was the Lord who in chapter 1. Had fixed the lot. So it fell to Jonah. And Jonah was found to be guilty for the storm. It was the Lord who had him thrown overboard.

It was the Lord then who had appointed this great fish. To swallow him up. And save him from drowning. That this was all the Lord's doing. It's this moment of spiritual awakening for him. Having been running away from God. He now sees that God has been pursuing him. He has felt God's hand on his life. And there are no coincidences in any of our lives are there?

[6 : 05] There are no coincidences for any of us. The Bible is clear that the God of the Bible is the God who is in control of everything. Ephesians 1 puts it like this. That he works out everything in conformity with the purpose of the world.

No accidents. No coincidences. No fate. Now that doesn't mean we're like pawns in a game of chess. God just shifting us around as he pleases. Rather we're children who are loving father disciplines and brings back.

And we'll use even bad things in our lives. Sometimes especially hard things in our lives. To bring us back into his good purposes. And into his love as he does here with Jonah.

As we'll see. So the question this raises for us is. When hard times come. When life is difficult. How do we respond? What do we think?

Do we roll up our sleeves and think. Okay this is a challenge. I've got to get through this. Yeah it's a very male response sometimes. Me man. Me win. That kind of attitude.

[7 : 09] Maybe we try and rationalise away the difficulties. Or it was a coincidence. Maybe this happened. Maybe something else happened. It's all random. Or maybe when it's painful we try and escape the pain.

Medicate the pain in some way. Some do that through shopping. Some do it through drink and drugs. Some do it through entertainment. Or maybe we try and fill the holes. Fill the gaps in our lives.

With busyness. With work. Even with charitable deeds. Trying desperately to fill the gaps. Or do we like Jonah recognise God's hand at work.

Recognise that the God who made the heavens and the earth. Is shaking us up. Johnny Erickson Tarder. A Christian lady who is a young woman.

Who was paralysed in a freak diving accident. Wrote this a bit later on. When God brings suffering into your life as a Christian. Be it mild or drastic.

[8 : 07] He is forcing you to decide on issues you have been avoiding. He is pressing you to ask yourself some questions. Am I going to continue trying to live in two worlds?

Obedying Christ. And my own sinful desires? Or am I going to refuse to worry? Am I going to be grateful for my trials? Am I going to abandon my sins?
In short. Am I going to be like Christ? He provides the suffering. But the choice is yours. I think they are remarkable words from a woman.

Who is quadriplegic. After that diving accident. And yet seized God's hand. For her good. In the midst of that suffering. So what did Jonah experience?

Well first. He felt his own helplessness. And secondly. He felt God's hand at work. He saw God's hand at work. In his life. But thirdly. He discovered his greatest fear.

[9 : 04] He found what his greatest fear was. Back in chapter 1. Three times. We are told that Jonah was fleeing. From the presence of the Lord. You see that twice in verse 3. Once again in verse 10.

And in the original language. That is literally. Fleeing from before the face of the Lord. And yet you see what Jonah fears. As we look at verse 4.

Of chapter 2. Take it from verse 3. You cast me into the deep. Into the hearts of the sea. And the floods surrounded me. All your ways. And your billows. Cast over me.

Then I said. I am driven from your sight. This man who fled. Away from before the Lord's face. Is now terrified. That he is out of God's sight forever.

Do you know what it is like. To feel invisible. I feel invisible. Almost every time. I go into a pub. Or any restaurant I am in. You know. Try to attract someone's attention. They don't see you.

[10 : 00] They look over you. They ignore you. And that is what Jonah fears. Now that God is going to do to him. I have been driven from your sight. You no longer care about me. You are no longer looking at me.

I am just invisible to you. And that actually. is a sort of beginning experience. Of what. Of what. Of what. Is ultimately fulfilled in hell.

In hell. Is to be. In a sense completely. Well. To be completely disregarded from God. Completely out of the scope of his loving care.

Completely distant. From his fatherly. Concern. Completely away. From any peace. And love. And light. And hope. Because that is ultimately what hell is.

God giving us up. To our selfishness. To our hate. And he carrying the wrath. And anger for eternity. That comes. When we. Turn away from him. And that is what Jonah is so terrified of.

[11 : 01] In verse 6. He puts it slightly differently. I went down to the land. Whose bars closed upon me forever. As he sinks down to the sea. He thinks I am going to the underworld. I am going to the place of the dead.

I am going to be out of God's reach forever. And it is only at that point. Faced with the reality of being cut off from God. That Jonah realises. That is actually the worst possible thing.

That could happen to him. Many people think. That actually to get rid of God. And be good. That God is the cause of problems. That God is the cause of grief in my life. And yet the reality is.

There is no hope. There is no love. There is no life. There is no life. There is no joy. Without God. So to be cut off from God. Is absolutely the worst thing.

For any human being. And Jonah in the depths of the sea. And in the belly of the whale. Now realises that. He realises that is not what he wants at all.

[11 : 59] He wants God back. And yet look again at verse 4. Because he also senses this hope. Then I said. I am driven away from your sight.

Yet. I shall look again upon your holy temple. The temple was a place in Jerusalem. Where. A visible sign of God's presence among his people. The place where God could be worshipped. So Jonah. Fearing being cut off forever. Suddenly thinks. Actually there is still hope. There is still hope. I will yet look again.

On your holy temple. Now why did he think that? I think there are two reasons. One is. He had just been swallowed by a big fish. That was little clue to him.

There was hope. He wasn't actually going to drown after all. Surely it must have been God who sent that fish. But I think the other reason. He had hope. That's the reason we see as we get to the end.

[12 : 54] Is that he knew the character of God. He knew that the Lord God is gracious. And compassionate. The Lord God is the one. Who brings salvation. And we will come back to that.

In a moment. But there is an important lesson for us here. Here was Jonah trying to flee from God's presence. And it is only as he acknowledges his need for God's presence.

His need for God to have his eyes upon him. That he starts to. Return to the Lord again. See restoration to God. Had to begin in the area.

Where rebellion against God. Was first manifest. Let me say that again. Restoration to God. Had to begin in the very area. Where rebellion against God.

First flared up. So Jonah's rebellion. Was he wanted to flee from the sight of the Lord. Flee from the presence of the Lord. Now restoration begins. As he longs to come back to God's temple.

[13 : 53] He longs to be back in God's sight again. And remember. Jonah's a believer here. He's a prophet of God. He's somebody who believed in the Lord God. So this isn't about becoming a Christian for the first time.

Although it does apply to that. But for those of us who are Christians. There are times in our lives. We rebel. We walk away. And the way back to restore fellowship with God.

Is to return in the very area where we went astray. So maybe we go astray through our work. Actually we end up working for ourselves. Not for God. We leave God out of our work.

Then repentance. Being restored to fellowship with God. Begins in that very workplace. As we recall that we're working for him. As his servants. As his ambassadors.

As his children. We commit our work to the Lord. Or maybe if our rebellion is first expressed. In a sense of pride. And looking down on other people.

[14 : 53] Then restoration to fellowship will begin with. Humility. Seeking forgiveness from those people we've offended. And looked down on.

See what did Jonah experience? He experienced his own helplessness. He experienced God's hand in his circumstances. He experienced that his greatest fear was to be without God.

As that opened the way for restoration with God. And that leads us on to the fourth thing he experienced. Which was God's grace. Look again at verse 4. Then I said I'm driven away from your sight.

Yet I shall again look upon your holy temple. Verse 6 we see it even more clearly. 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. This is the first time Jonah's come up. All the way since chapter 1 he's been going down.

[15 : 53] If you want to look at it for a moment. Chapter 1 verse 3. Jonah went down to Joppa. Chapter 1 verse 5. He lay down.

Jonah had gone down into the inner part of the ship. And lay down and was fast asleep. He's been going down away from God all the time. Then verse 15. And he was thrown out.

He was thrown out into the boat. He sinks down into the water. Doesn't use the word exactly. But the image is there isn't it? And it's only here. It's only here. Where suddenly the direction is reversed.

Now Jonah comes up. Why is he coming up? How is he coming up? What does it say? Verse 6. Yet you brought up my life from the pit. See Jonah is experiencing God's grace.

The grace that's pursued him across the ocean. The grace that's sent a fish to swallow him up. The grace that's now lifting him back up. When previously he was helpless.

[16 : 58] Ultimately that's how change comes about. It's not through his travel. It's not through his job. It's through God's grace. Jonah experiences God's grace. Lifting him up.

Redirecting him. So that's what Jonah experienced. His own helplessness. God's hand. His deep fear of being without God. And God's grace lifting him up.

So what does Jonah conclude from all this? Well he gets his conclusion and its implications in verses 8 and 9. 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 vowed I will pay. And here's why. Here's the conclusion. Salvation belongs to the Lord.

Salvation belongs to the Lord. That means rescue belongs to God. It's God's prerogative. It's in God's power. It's in God's ability to do. Not in hands.

[17 : 56] Not in minds as Jonah. Let's think for a minute. Did Jonah deserve to be rescued? Absolutely not. He deliberately run away from God. Did Jonah do anything to aid his rescue?

No of course not. He didn't even have a life jacket on when he's thrown overboard. Health and safety would have something to say about that. The rescue is entirely God's. And so that's Jonah's conclusion.

Salvation. Rescue. Belongs to God. Now salvation is one of those very Christian words, isn't it? Christians use it a lot. But what does it mean? As we read through the Bible we find that salvation is actually a deep longing of every human heart, really.

The fact it comes from God is the thing we don't like. On one level, we often ask, can I be accepted and loved despite the mistakes I've made? Can I be forgiven for the things I've done wrong?

Another question people ask is, can I change? Can I be different? Or am I stuck in this way of life? Am I stuck in my being the kind of person I am?

[19 : 01] Formed by my parents. Formed by my culture. Formed by my genes. Can I change? Is the hope of change? And the final thing people ask is, can I ever be free from suffering?

Can this world ever be free from suffering? Is there ever a time the pain will end? Is there ever any rest and peace? Can I be accepted? Can I change?

Can I know peace and safety? The Bible's answer is yes. Yes to all of those. But not on your own terms.

Salvation belongs to the Lord. It's only God who can bring the salvation. Who can say, yes, there is a way to be forgiven and loved and accepted. Yes, there is a way to change.

Yes, there is a way for the pain to end and everything to be made right again. That is what God does. He demonstrates that here with Jonah, doesn't he? Can Jonah be forgiven?

[20 : 00] Yes, God is bringing him back. And we'll see next time how God recommissions him again. Can Jonah's heart change? Yes, we see that here, don't we? He wants to flee from the Lord.

Now he's crying out to the Lord and glad the Lord is answering him. Was there hope for Jonah? Was there hope for life after the apparent death of being in the fish?

Yes, look at verse 10. The Lord spoke to the fish and it vomited Jonah out upon the dry land. So it was hope. It was life after death, as it were.

What about us? What is this salvation that God offers us? Well, if we keep on reading through the story of the Bible, we find a man who came and spoke about the sign of Jonah.

And said, as Jonah spent three days and three nights in the belly of a whale, so the Son of Man will spend three days and three nights in the ground and then be raised to new life again.

[20 : 58] That man, of course, was Jesus. It's in Jesus' death, in trusting Jesus' death, we can find acceptance. He died to pay for all the wrongs we've done.

So that we can get his perfect record instead of our lousy record. He rose again to show that there is new life. He sends his spirit to all who trust in him.

To change our hearts, to change us from the inside. So, like Jonah, we can have a new heart. We can be changed. And, of course, his resurrection shows us hope.

That there will be a day coming when he comes back and makes everything new. Just as there was life after death for him. So there will be true, real, proper life for all who trust in him.

Where does that come from? Salvation belongs to the Lord. It's all his work. Well, there's our choice, isn't there? Jonah puts it in verse 8.

[21 : 58] This is the implications of this conclusion Jonah reaches. Verse 8. Those who pay regard to vain idols forsake their hope of steadfast love. That steadfast love is the Lord's steadfast love.

It's his key characteristic, if you like. But if we pay regard, if we trust it, if we live our lives looking to vain idols for hope, then we forfeit that love.

The word translated idols, they're literally these empty vanities. Nothings of nothingness. Yet so often we look for hope in those things, don't we? Be it in Korea or other religions.

Looking for Buddhism for peace and refuge and hope. That is not salvation. Salvation only comes through Jesus. And if we pursue these vain idols, we miss out.

We forsake the hope of steadfast love. The hope of the transforming love of God expressed in his son Jesus. So either we reject that love or, what does Jonah do at verse 9?

[23 : 03] He's grateful for that love. With the voice of thanksgiving, I will sacrifice to you. What I have vowed, I will pay. Salvation belongs to the Lord. Having experienced God's grace was a life-changing experience for Jonah.

And so he pledged a new commitment to the Lord as gratitude for what the Lord had done for him. We may not have been in whale's tummies. But we're all naturally cut off from God.

And it's only in Jesus we can be lifted back up and know the salvation that God offers. Let's pray.