

Jonah 2

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[0 : 00] And turn to Jonah, chapter 2, which is on page 774. In the world, and it's not at all what we were expecting.

As the world has advanced, people thought that fewer and fewer thought we'd believe in God. But in fact, the opposite is happening today.

So today, over one third of the population of the world claim to be followers of Jesus. We know not only a place like that in America, Southeast Asia, China, people are coming to Christ at a very rapid rate.

In seven years' time, China is going to be the largest Christian nation in the world. And we can't keep that away with the millions of people becoming Christians.

But it's not happening here. And it's not happening on our doorstep. Whatever certain crumly Christians want to tell you. As long as we think it's okay not to take Jesus too seriously in our culture.

[1 : 33] All over the world, people are saying yes to Jesus. But because of how it is here in the UK, we imagine that we don't have to take him that seriously. Why should we say yes to Jesus? Why should we take him seriously?

And that's the question that I want us to think about from Jonah chapter 2. And in our New Testament reading, people were asking the same question. It's not a new question. They were demanding a sign.

We saw that in that reading in Luke 11. Show us a sign, they said. Despite the fact that Jesus had performed many signs and many miracles. He was healing the sick.

Casting out demons. Stilling the storms. But despite all those miracles, all those signs, they still wanted proof, didn't they? They wanted irrefutable proof that he was not in league with the devil. They wanted a sign to confirm all the other signs that Jesus was giving them. They wanted a token from heaven. It was as if they wanted something written in the heavens, if you like.

[2 : 39] That was given independently of Jesus to show that he really was who he claimed to be. That he was from God. And Jesus says to them, doesn't he? You evil and adulterous generation.

An evil and an adulterous generation. They demand a sign, but no sign will be given it. Except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights, so the Son of Man will be in the belly of the earth for three days and three nights.

That is the sign. The sign of the prophet Jonah. It goes on to say in that New Testament reading, the men of Nineveh.

That pagan, sprawling city of 120,000 people. The men of Nineveh, they will stand up on the day of judgment. And they'll condemn that generation of Jesus' day.

Because they repented at Jonah's preaching. And something far greater than Jonah is in their midst. They want a sign. So Jesus says, look at Jonah. And Jonah chapter two.

[3 : 44] And all the chapters in this little book of Jonah, the trouble is, the story of chapter two of Jonah really isn't going to help us take Jesus seriously.

Is it? It's the story of a man who was swallowed by a fish. How can anyone take that seriously? And Jesus said, it really happened.

It is not a parable. It is a miracle. It is a miracle. The people of Nineveh will be in heaven because Jesus was swallowed by a gigantic fish.

Literally in the Greek, a meg katos. The people of Nineveh, whole generations of Nineveh will actually be in heaven because Jonah was swallowed by a fish and vomited out by a fish.

And this is a friend of mine preaching on this passage this week who said to me that at a very profound point in the Bible that vomit is never a good thing in the Bible. It's remarkable in opening.

[4 : 45] But this generation of Nineveh, they will rise up and they will condemn that generation. So according to Jesus, it really did happen. It's not a parable. People try to explain it away and they say it's just a story.

It is not. It really did happen. And that miracle of Jonah raised from the bottom of the sea points to the greatest miracle of all which is Jesus raised from the dead. As Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights, so the Son of Man will be in the heart of the earth three days and three nights.

So we're going to look at the miracle of Jonah raised from the dead and look at the miracle of Jesus raised from the dead. And I hope we all see why you have to tonight take Jesus seriously.

First of all, the death that we need saving from. The death we need saving from. Now you'll pick it up on my first reading. It's a rescue story. It's a rescue, a seed story.

And Jesus is the rescuer. And what do we need saving from? And the first thing you notice here is the death that we need saving from. And the story goes over, doesn't it, from the end of chapter 1, verse 17.

[5 : 49] And the Lord appointed a great fish to swallow Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights. And that phrase, three days and three nights, used in the ancient world to say long enough to be definitely dead.

So you can imagine the headlines in the local newspaper and the Joppa Times. Rescuers call off search for missing prophet. Jonah, lost at sea, presumed dead.

He's a dead man, as far as everyone is concerned. He is doomed, not only physically, but spiritually, because he's been running away from God, as we saw last week.

And to run away from God is not only to run into physical death, but it's to run into spiritual management from God's presence forever. That's what the Bible calls the second death.

And so here he is, as we pick up the story in chapter 2, heading for a fate worse than death. Look at chapter 2. He is sinking down into a watery grave.

[6 : 52] And as you read these verses, I hope you can pick up the sensation in the narrative of falling, of spiraling down. Jonah is drowning. Look at verse 3. All your billows, all your waves and your billows pass over me.

There he is, bobbing about on the surface, trying to keep his head above water. And then in verse 5, there's progression. The water's closing over me to take my life.

Up to the neck, the watery depths. The deep surrounding me. As he tumbles down, weeds were wrapped around my head at the roots of the mountains.

He's beginning to sink, isn't he? And I went down to the land whose bars closed upon me forever. It's a very graphic description of someone drowning.

Down he goes to the roots of the mountains, banished to the bottom of the sea. He says that in verse 7, when my life was fainting away, I remembered the Lord. Talk about a last minute conversion.

[7 : 57] Talk about an 11th hour rescue. As my lungs filled with water and I gasped for breath, with his last breath, he cries out to the Lord.

And no doubt, his whole life flashes before him. They say that's what happens. Everything goes in slow motion, I've read. And you begin to see your whole life from the perspective of eternity. And that is where Jonah is.

Verse 3 says, can you see it? For you cast me into the deep. Now that should shock you. Why should that shock you? Because that doesn't matter in chapter 1. Because in chapter 1, he says, the sailors, you pick me up.

And you throw me in. And we're told, they threw him in. But now at the bottom of the sea, he realises what is happening. He realises that this is a God thing. You threw me into the depths of the sea.

And verse 4, I've been banished. I'm driven away from your sight. It's interesting, it's exactly the same word in verse 4, driven away, that is used to describe Adam and Eve from the garden.

[9 : 05] Do you remember? They were doomed for sorrow, toil, and death, and driven from the garden. It's exactly the same word. But Jonah, you were banished. You ran away.

Jonah says, yes, but this is where it leads to. But when you run away from God, this is where you end up. This is what death means. That if you're running away from God tonight, if you've got no time for God in your life, this is how you will die.

Don't believe all the nonsense as the undertaker's brochures. Death is not a happy release. If you're on the run from God.

And when we die, we don't just encounter our own physical limitations and the shutting down of our bodies. If you are running away from God, you will encounter God as an angry judge. And that's where Jonah is at the bottom, and the sea vanished from God's sight, crying out for help.

Look at verse 2. Look at his cry. I called out to the Lord out of my distress. And he answered me, out of the belly of Sheol, the place of death, I cried, and he heard my voice.

[10:16] Let's look at this quote. Chapter 2 is a very interesting chapter. Everything slows down in chapter 2. It's a really fast book, Jonah. A really fast, action-packed book. Chapter 1 is all action.

Boats and souls and sailors and giant fish. It's a very satirical story. It's a very funny story. But suddenly everything slows down in chapter 2.

It's very serious. And what you have in Jonah chapter 2 is one of the great prayers of the Bible. Look at how he prays from David Jones' locker right in the bottom of the Mediterranean Sea. And you can't help but notice, the first thing you notice is that Jonah's prayer is full of the Bible.

I know we're so unfamiliar with the Psalms, we don't spot that, but Jonah's prayer is full of the Psalms. He's a psalm singer. It's full of the Psalms, full of Scripture.

It's why it sounds so familiar. I don't know whether you've ever noticed that. Chapter 2 reads like you've read it before. And you have. Because it's packed with Psalms. A kind of medley of the Psalms.

[11:20] Psalms that Jonah would have learned as a child that he would have sung in worship. And these Psalms are a reservoir of hope. You'll notice if you come to visit a Christian, an older Christian who suffers with dementia, sometimes it's very difficult to get through to them.

You try to hold the conversation, you talk about various things, and then you quote a psalm or a song. And you sing one of the old hymns. And they join in. And it's a bit like what is happening here at the bottom of the Mediterranean Sea.

Do you know the story of Dick Whittington? The Lord Mayor of London? And apparently, according to the legend, this is in the 1400s, he was an orphan whose only possession was his cat.

And he used to catch in rats and so on. And he runs away. I think he has one crack at being Lord Mayor of London. And he runs away. And as he's running away to the edge of the city of London, he hears the great bell of Bo.

And Bo bells are ringing in the distance. And it's almost as if they were saying to him, he says, turn again, Whittington, Lord Mayor of London. He turned around and went back into the city. And according to the legend, he became Lord Mayor of London another three times.

[12:33] And it's almost as if Jonah is running away from God. And there he is at the bottom of the sea and his life is ebbing away. And down there at the bottom of the sea, he seems to hear, well, not the great Bo of London, great Bo bell, but the singing of a congregation.

The singing of a familiar psalm and hymn. And those psalms seem to be saying to him, turn again, Jonah. Turn again. So Jonah here is hearing these psalms again and he's turning back at the bottom of the sea at the very last moment.

Verse 4, I've been driven away from your sight. Yet, yet I shall look again upon your holy temple. He's turning and there's hope. Verse 7, and when my life was fading away, I remember the Lord and my prayer came to you and to your holy temple.

And some people that live on your street and live on my street and who you work with and who you stand at the school gate with, they have never cried out to God because they don't think it matters. And they don't think it matters because they think they can live their lives without Him. And maybe that's you this evening. And you sleep easy at life at night.

[13:47] You've got an interesting life, a full life and you sleep easy at night just like Jonah on board is in chapter 1. And you've suppressed your conscience. It's easy to do that in the church. And you're quite happy without God really in your life but you need to see where it's leading you.

Because to live without God is to eventually die without God. And that is a frightful prospect. And Jesus calls it dying in your sins.

And I know this is a very pleasant subject but we need to make this point clear. John Wesley, the 18th century preacher said about his people, our people die well but not everyone dies well.

And to die well you need a saviour. Think of the train journey to Wales. You're going to the promised land.

Right? You get all that having to. You go on this train through a pretty grotty, dig-off pathway and red in its Bristol Park but even worse. And then the tunnels start.

[14 : 52] And as you go along you go under a bridge and then you go under a tunnel and you say am I there yet? And then another tunnel and then another tunnel and then there's one quite longer tunnel. And you come out.

The sun is shut and the rain is pouring. You're through the tunnel. Death, death is like that. The Christian will not see death Jesus says.

A true believer will not see death. It will be like that. You'll go through the tunnel and before you know it you'll see you through the other side. It's not like that for those who are left behind is it? But that's what death is like for the people.

You go through the tunnel and you're out of it before you know. But if you're not a Christian you will come crashing into death.

And you will encounter God as your judge and that is a frightful prospect. Psalm 139 says Many of our people are saying I take the winds from the morning and I dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea the psalmist says.

[15 : 58] Even there you are there. That's exactly what Job was trying to do. If I go as far as the east is from the west that's exactly what he was trying to do. I cannot escape God.

It's not true is it that when you're dead you're dead. It's not true. And so tonight for every single person in this room and in this great city you will either be gone as your loving heavenly father or your angry judge.

And the time is very short to sort that out. And that is why you have to take Jesus seriously. Because some people aren't there and they think it's too late.

It's too late to cry out to God. I've been in church all my life. I've become a church member. I've been baptised and I still don't know God. And I've lived without him all my life.

I've lived too long. It's too late. I've gone too far. I've sunk too low. Well, Jonah chapter 2 is just your chapter. And it's a great chapter for those of us who've got unbelieving relatives because as long as there is life there is hope.

[17 : 06] Because there at the bottom of the sea he cries out at the end of verse 3 all your waves and your billows they pass over me and then I said I've driven away from your sights yet I shall again look upon the holy temple.

Hope in God. There is hope. Now Jonah quote Psalm 42 remember how Psalm 42 ends hope in God for I shall again pray to you as long as there is life there is hope.

Second point is the God who saves us from death well that's the God who saves us from death we've seen the death we need to be saved from certainly the God who saves from death in verse 17 chapter 1 and the Lord appointed a great fish for swallow Jonah the fish who knows who knows what it was but that fish was appointed appointed by God and it was the vehicle of Jonah's salvation it's unimaginable isn't it?

what it must be like to wake up at the belly of a fish and not know whether they're dead or alive stuff and nightmares it must have been gross but do you see what he says in verse 6 chapter 2 yet you brought up my life from the pit oh Lord my God the fish was the vehicle that God used to bring Jonah's life up from the pit to save him the fish was the answer to his prayer it was through that fish that God rescued him and so that it's no coincidence that this denizen of the deep just happened to turn up at that very moment the Lord appointed a great fish himself he is the Lord of heaven and he can do the ice I hope you're not embarrassed by the supernaturalism of the Bible the supernaturalism of creation the supernaturalism of Noah of the prophets of Jonah the supernaturalism of Jesus we must be unembarrassed supernaturalists he commands the birds of the air and the fish of the sea have his will he is their creator but thank God he is their saviour and rescuer what a great rescuer he is he said what does it take God to create how does God create he speaks a word it happens it's very easy for God to create he imagines it he speaks it and it comes into existence but to save to save he has to give his son and that is why Jesus takes this story of Jonah and connects him with his own story and that is why he links the story of Jonah and the fish with his own death and resurrection just like Jonah was three days and three nights in the valley of a fish so the son of man will be three days and three nights this is the vehicle that God will use to save human beings just as he appointed a great fish to rescue Jonah in the Mediterranean so in the fullness of time God sent his own son into the world to save and to rescue at just the right time God sent his own Jonah was three days and three nights in the valley of the fish so he will be three days

and three nights in the valley of the earth Jesus is the equivalent of that great fish in fact the sign of being a Christian in the early times was a fish was it why because it comes from the word ichthus which is a kind of acronym Jesus Christ son of God and some people some very bad drivers have it on the back of their car nobody can cut you up and you see the fish sign but it was the sign of early [21 : 03] Christians and that's how early Christians identified themselves ichthus Jesus Christ son of God and saviour is what it means the death and resurrection of Jesus who died for our sins and wrote again for our justification the creed says he descended he descended to the dead Paul says he descended to the lower parts of the earth he descended to the dead why did he do it was it a tragedy a mistake an accident it was deliberate Jesus died according to the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God it was appointed in eternity that Jesus should come and descend into Sheol into the lowest parts of the earth that was God's act of salvation for the human race and on the third day he raised him from the dead in the late 1980s

I read this this week a Christian book star in England paid £50,000 for the postmark Jesus is Alive you know the postmark they stamp every letter and he paid £50,000 that every letter in the UK would be stamped with the postmark Jesus is Alive he wanted Jesus is Alive franked on millions of letters leading up to he paid £50,000 for it I'm not sure if it's a great use of that but it caused that upon the God crowd the British Humanist Society complained in a letter to the Guardian those who believe that Jesus is dead and have devoted certain thoughts to the matter do not wish to be told every day for six weeks that he isn't other letters concern phrases like greatly perturbed deeply offensive obscene Bernard Lemon wasn't a Christian but he was a journalist for the time through and in a brilliantly named article the article was called when franking in senses he wrote this in the text he said suppose you go wrong surely you don't mind supposing if we promise not to tell anyone and that bloke from

South then he was so hooked on the pale of Galilee to the extent that he's willing to shout out 52,000 pound to promote him suppose if he's right and Jesus is alive what is so terrible about that why wouldn't you want that to be true why is it so disturbing to you that Jesus is alive it's very interesting isn't it coming from an easiest why is it so disturbing to people let me tell you because people just want to be left alone they want to be left alone they want to live their lives without any kind of interference without any kind of accountability especially to God but you see if Jesus really did go down to the depths of the grave for our sins and if God really didn't raise him on the third day from the dead then it's not the kind of information that you can file away in the back of your mind as if it was just interesting that information that Jesus Christ is risen from the dead well it's bomb in the building information isn't it it's going to

Heathrow airport tomorrow morning and the announcement comes over the time it says it's an official announcement there is a bomb in the tomb and I'll please evacuate the building what would you do would you order another flat white I doubt it you would act on it wouldn't you especially if it was an official announcement because that sort of information you cannot ignore and I'm telling you that this is the sign that God has given the world it's the sign of Jonah that on the third day God raised Jesus from the belly of the earth for our justification that is how Paul preached the resurrection to the intelligentsia in Athens on Mars Hill he preaches the resurrection he says to the academics on the Areopagus therefore God has overlooked the times of ignorance isn't that a wonderful way of summing up civilization he speaks to the Greeks for goodness sake he talks about Greek civilization he talks about

Roman civilization the greatest civilizations that the world has ever seen and he says God God's winks at those times of ignorance those great Greek philosophers those great Roman statesmen God is not impressed by that he overlooks them at these times of ignorance and now God commands all people every culture every civilization every language everywhere to repent and to turn around because he has set a day that he will judge the world in righteousness people talk about apologetics arguing the cause of the faith I've got a big common apologetics in fact I think apologetics!

[26 : 14] I agree but it's got to get to there you've got to get to the point where you call people to repent you've got to get to the people when you say to people God has said a day that you have judged the words and if you don't get there whatever you're doing it's not possible proclamation and he will judge the world in righteousness by the man he's appointed and how do you know that?

Because he's raised him from the dead that's what Paul says that is a sign of Jonah and embarrassed supernaturalism and that's why you have to take Jesus seriously to it so what do we

need to do about it?

Last point how are we to respond to what God has done for three things that Jonah mentions at the end of the chapter verse 8 identify your idols those who pay regard to vain idols I think the NIV I can't say it's the NIV I think something like those who cling to vain idols is that right?

Leslie Bals is my NIV expert get off Facebook Leslie it never works when you can't go interactive does it?

What is what is verse 8 in the NIV does anybody have the NIV? Yes paper bibles those who cling to worthless idols it's very helpful isn't it?

[27 : 52] Jonah wakes up in the belly of the fish he wakes himself up it's very interesting Jonah was a prophet this isn't the only place you see Jonah Jonah was a prophet in the northern kingdom and he's been used by God marvelously you can read about that in two kings this isn't the only place you find Jonah in the Old Testament he's a prophet in the northern kingdom he's a servant of God and suddenly he's in the belly of the fish and in the crisis he wakes up to the fact that all his life he's made an idol of his ministry that is a terrible thing to wake up to you could have been in church work all your life and suddenly you wake up and you realise it's been idolatry he wanted ministry success that's why he'd run away he didn't want to go to Nineveh so he ran away and God was telling him to go he says no why because he put his ministry first and his reputation first it's more complicated than that it's more subtle than that he also had a kind of religious idol because we know that he felt superior to the Ninevites and that's why he didn't want to go there they are pagans they are

Israel's enemies and he's a Jew he is in covenant with Yahweh and he'd rather go to hell and see those pagans say I don't want people like that in this church I'd rather go to hell and see pagans and so he runs away and at the bottom of the tree God shows him that's idolatry Jonah and as long as you cling to that way of thinking you forfeit my grace can you see that at the end of verse 8 you forsake their hope of steadfast love you forfeit my covenant love what a lesson to learn at the very end that could have been it for during goodness and he could have gone into eternity clutching to an idol clinging to an idol he could have forfeited he could have forsake the hope of steadfast love of God is that how you will die that you will wake up to the fact that all your life you've been clutching in idols it's possible for ministers that they have to do that what is your idol well one of the things that you've nightmares about what is your greatest nightmare what do you worry about losing the most that's your idol what do you rely on to comfort yourself when things go bad or difficult what do you run into food shopping sex leisure what is it sport can't be no look at it what's going to happen when you're too old and too fat to play anymore will your idol comfort you then of course it will drop you drop you to the second team what is it is work your idol do you think God would impress with your sporting trophies bring them on judgment day if you're clinging to your career and you get your sense of who you are and your sense of salvation from your job and your identity what's going to happen when they lay off people in the workplace you're going to take your appraisal in on judgment day very well!

got a bonus will work be kind to you what about your peers those who promise you such a good time will they still love you when you're no fun to be with what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world Jesus says I mean he loses his own soul maybe quite possibly you're one of those beautiful people and you've lived a charmed life and you've gained the whole world and such I know people like that they've got plenty of money they've got a decent home and then the news comes in from your doctor that the results of the tests are in and all the money in all the world is no use to you then because what you need then can you see it it's the end of verse 8 steadfast love loving kindness it's grace and those who cling if you persist in clinging to that worthless idol well you won't have it when you need it and you will forfeit the grace of God and it's so serious that we need to identify our idols we need to go home and take a good long hard look at ourselves and say what am I clinging to to give me my self-worth to give me my self-esteem and that's the first thing identify your idols certainly give yourself to the

Lord verse 9 but I with the voice of thanksgiving will not sacrifice to you what I vowed I will pay a friend of mine who was a minister went to visit someone who hadn't been to their church for years and they had been in the church generations past and they had a connection with the church and he went on a visit in the pastor went in and he saw on the wall a framed baptismal certificate he said well I talked to him about that why is he putting that on the wall so he asked him the man what is this and he says that's my certificate to say I was baptised in your church and the minister

sounded brilliantly when are you going to cash it in when are you going to cash it in and some of you are members of this church and you've made membership vows to belong to this church and serve the Lord through this local church when will you take those vows seriously our idols are not obvious but what idolatry does is idolatry drains the spiritual energy out of us so you've got no time and Jonah says I've woken up to myself and from now on he says I'm going to fulfil my vows and I'm going to take you seriously so let's think about sport on

[34 : 13] Sunday there's nothing wrong with sport don't get me wrong but if it comes to a choice between sport on Sunday or gathering with the Lord's people on the Lord's day it really is no contest with a song of thanksgiving with a voice of thanksgiving I'll keep my vow to gather with the Lord's people on the Lord's day and so let's identify our idols and let's give ourselves to the Lord let's recommit ourselves to him listen to what I read from J.I.

Packard this week the only proof of past conversion is present convertedness the only proof of past conversion is present convertedness smash your idols hand your life open to the Lord and then lastly pray like Jonah verse 7 when my life was fading away I remember the Lord and my prayer came to you in your holy temple like Daniel in Babylon remember Daniel he opens the window towards Jerusalem it's interesting because Jonah is from the north of Samaria and yet at the bottom of the sea he looks towards Jerusalem and the temple in Jerusalem and all it signifies and tonight through the death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ we have access we come boldly to the throne of grace and we are bold to enter the holy place through the blood of Jesus through a new and through a living way that he's opened for us through the curtain that is his flesh and so tonight as we come to the table that is growing here let's not claim to worthless idols let's commit our lives to the Lord and let us come back to him in prayer