

Run, Repent and Relive: Jonah 1:17-2:10

United Parish 9th May 2021

God's word is amazing –inspires, encourages, empowers, saves... **but...** is hard to get your head around (not the start you were expecting!). But it is. Messy, weird, hard to understand...

Why didn't God just write it all down himself –surely that would have been easier –just give us the instructions!

So, when God created the cosmos and life with this crescendo of a people to love. He chose to reveal himself and his purpose to us through **relationship** –so that every word in the bible flows from the inspiration of God but the pen of man. So that the laws, deeds, prayers, worship, great events are all revealed through the lens of God's relationship with people.

It's supposed to be messy in parts because people are messy.

Jonah is a good example of this –told to call the wicked Ninevites to repent he runs in fear from God.

So, Jonah **RUNS**, God chases him down and, in defeat, he asks to be thrown to his death from the ship.

And then the amazing things happens –the one verse we can all remember from the story *'17 Now the Lord provided a huge fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.'*

And it seems like some of us struggle with this... *must've been a whale? But for 3 days? Maybe this is just a metaphor? How would you survive? Didn't it happen to some 19th century whaler?*

If this is the area of faith that you struggle with then be assured Jesus believed in it, he quoted it in Matthew 12. Jonah was clear about what happened and that it wasn't a metaphor–he even had seaweed wrapped around his head!

Look. Do you believe that 'In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.?' Do you believe that Jesus dies, rose again and ascended into heaven? Do you believe, (at least mostly!) in a God that created the cosmos, the laws of physics, all life forms, and a heaven? Then you don't really need to worry too much about rationalising what sort of fish could've done this and a man still survive –God could've created a giant mackerel to do it if he wanted!

So then down, down, down to the deep, to darkness and hell of the belly of the fish.

And (v.1) in his distress he prays. He is scared, overwhelmed, panicked, broken, and seeming separated from God. Alive but dead –in a living hell with no idea when or if he will escape. The great prophet Jonah who in 2 Kings 14 we hear brings the word of God to Israel as it grows and expands and defeats its enemies. This great prophet with the ear of the nation would now feel what it would be like to be **lost**. To know separation from God like the Ninevites to be (v.3) 'hurled into the depths', '(v.4) 'banished from God's sight' with his (v.7) 'life ebbing away.'

Some of us have known dark times when God has seemed far away, but others know dark times without God. Maybe it is no harm for God to show us what it feels like to be lost sometimes –to understand what it feels like for others.

So, Jonah **REPENTS**. And this no ‘coming to faith’ repentance. This is the prideful Christian, too good to do the lowly jobs, ‘knows better than God’ Christian that we all become from time to time and need to repent of. This is the repentance of someone who finds that their bad deeds and their attitude have been noticed by God and that God is doing something about it. The repentance that I have had to go through all too often -thankfully without having to experience the deep.

And this prayer of Jonah in chapter 2 is likely composed as a summary of all the things Jonah would have been thinking and praying during the 3 nights.

Notice throughout this prayer that I repenting he:

1. **Accepts God’s Discipline.** (v.3) ‘You hurled me in’, (v.4) ‘You banished me’. Jonah knows what he has done wrong and he, eventually, takes it on the chin and accepts it. Look, God loves like and more than a father. And you are not perfect or even the person you are meant to be yet. So, God will discipline you:

“My son, do not make light of the Lord’s discipline,
and do not lose heart when he rebukes you,
⁶because the Lord disciplines the one he loves,
and he chastens everyone he accepts as his son.”^[a]

Our loving heavenly Father disciplines us to be better, blessed, fulfilled and at peace. So, put away the rebellious streak in your dealings with God. Replace the ‘But...’ with ‘You’re God, you’re right, fair enough...’ The other day God used a wee hallion to teach me a lesson ‘...fair enough God.’

2. In repenting **he trusts in God**. No matter the nightmare of the situation, or his pride and bad attitude –he still has that ‘lost son’ moment where he ‘comes to his senses ‘ (Luke 15:17) and (v.4) ‘yet I will look again toward your holy temple.’ -heaven. Even when he felt his life was ebbing away (v.7) his prayers turned to God. This is a man who seems to know he has failed God but still trusts in his place in heaven –as should you, no matter what the failures. New life in Christ is eternal, permanent life in Christ.
3. In repenting **he recommits**. (v.8, 9) ‘I’ve worshipped other things but not you ...but I’m going to make it good Lord’. He’s going to go to Ninevah, do what’s needed but, and this is crucial, he is not making a deal with God. This isn’t ‘You save me, and I’ll do you a favour back.’ Jonah knows he wasn’t saving himself as (v.9) ‘Salvation comes from the Lord.’
⁴ *lift up my eyes to the mountains—
where does my help come from?*
² *My help comes from the Lord,
the Maker of heaven and earth (Psalm 121)*

So, he has RUN, he's REPENTED and now he is going to RELIVE.

Jonah writes this obviously after the event but he is clear about articulating the new life he has received: (v.1) *'From deep in the realm of the dead I called for help, and you listened to my cry.'* And (v.6) *'To the roots of the mountains I sank down; the earth beneath barred me in forever. But you, Lord my God, brought my life up from the pit.'*

He is given the same gift that you and I receive when we repent –new life and new beginnings. Now, new life with lessons still to learn! God does not forgive us as if there will never be any consequence. The gift of Grace is free, but it was paid for at a price –the blood of Jesus. So, while our sins are wiped away it is still important sometimes that we pay the consequences of our actions – to discipline us, remind us of our need of God and to keep us humble. And the humility bit is the hardest lesson sometimes. What way will God discipline you and I so we can live this glorious new life but stay humble? Who knows but I'll say this; God could've caused the fish to serenely allow Jonah to step onto dry land and begin his mission. Instead the prideful national prophet of Israel gets to start again half traumatised and covered in fish vomit!

So, when you run from God, repent, take hold of the new life and stay humble before God teaches you humility!

Prayer.