

Jonah: In the Belly of the Fish

Goldstone Church – 24-Apr-16 10:30am

Jonah 2:1-10

Introduction

Jonah 2 has unusual opening and closing verses; opening with “*From inside the fish Jonah prayed*”, and closing, “*the fish... vomited Jonah onto dry land.*” Because these phrases are so unusual, we ask: what has happened between these two verses? How has Jonah’s relationship with God progressed from his opening gasp of a prayer (v.1), to standing on dry land (v.10)?

This passage shows us the steps that Jonah takes to restore his relationship with God. Jonah 1:3 says that “*Jonah ran away from the Lord*”, but during 3 days and nights in the fish, Jonah reconnects with God.

1. Restoring a Relationship with God means:

RETURNING

(JONAH 2:1-2)

“*In my distress I called to the Lord, and he answered me. From deep in the realm of the dead I called for help, and you listened to my cry.*” (Jonah 2:2)

Possibly the biggest obstacle to restoring a damaged relationship with God is the thought that there is no way back. This is the *incorrect* belief that what we have done is just too offensive to God, and there is no way back. This not the case.

God gives us His view: “*Return to me, and I will return to you, ’ says the Lord Almighty.*” (Malachi 3:7b).

Contrary to the lies that the Devil may whisper, God is *never* out of range. He is always listening out for anyone seeking a relationship with Him – and responds straightaway. A new relationship is established.

Notice how the vocabulary changes in Jonah 2:2. It moves from the impersonal, “*He answered me*” at start of verse, and changes to the personal, “*you listened to my cry*”. This reflects the start of a new, personal relationship.

However dark the valley, the first step to restoring a relationship with God is:

“*Return to me, and I will return to you, ’*”.

This is echoed in the New Testament, “*Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.*” (Hebrews 4:16).

Jonah was as good as dead, both physically and spiritually. But when it seemed there was no hope, God was there.

2. Restoring a Relationship with God means:

REFLECTING

(JONAH 2:3-7)

Jonah reflects on the mess that he has made of his life and notes how God has saved him.

“*You hurled me into the depths, into the very heart of the seas, and the currents swirled about me; all your waves and breakers swept over me.*” (Jonah 2:3)

“The engulfing waters threatened me, the deep surrounded me; seaweed was wrapped around my head.” (Jonah 2:5)

Jonah is swallowed up in a fish, surrounded on all sides by sea water, with his head bound and tied up with seaweed. It’s a recipe for impending death.

And yet, in the depths of his circumstances, Jonah turns back to God. *“I will look again towards your holy temple”* (Jonah 2:4b). In other words, ‘God, I’ve been looking away from you; now I will turn and look to you’.

Jonah goes on, *“But you ... brought my life up from the pit”* (Jonah 2:6). You have released me from the prison I was in, and brought me into the freedom of a relationship with you.

Jonah was as good as dead, both physically and spiritually. But when it seemed there was no hope, God was there.

3. Restoring a Relationship with God means:

REPENTING

(JONAH 2:8)

“Those who cling to worthless idols turn away from God’s love for them.” (Jonah 2:8)

One Bible commentary suggests that these idols refer to the Gentile Sailors; they were so afraid of the storm that they *“each cried out to his own god”* (Jonah 1:5).

This may be a valid connection, but Jonah may also be thinking about his own repentance.

There are numerous verses in the Bible emphasising the importance of repentance. Interestingly, these verses appear in both the Old Testament and the New Testament. For example:

- Verses about *personal* repentance: by King David (1 Chronicles 21:8) and Apostle Peter (Matthew 26:75) in NT.
- Verses about *corporate* repentance: by the Israelites (Judges 10:15) and the people in the cities of Lydda and Sharon (Acts 9:35) in NT.

Repentance is a constant theme in the Bible.

Repentance is the act of changing one's mind. It is more than just admitting to a wrongdoing and being sorry for what you have done. *True* repentance requires a complete change in heart, mind, soul – and actions.

Jonah’s true repentance meant that he literally had to get off the boat. He had to literally change his direction from west to east; to follow God’s direction, not his own.

Jonah was as good as dead, both physically and spiritually. But when it seemed there was no hope, God was there.

4. Restoring a Relationship with God means:

RENEWING

(JONAH 2:9-10)

“But I, with shouts of grateful praise, will sacrifice to you. What I have vowed I will make good. I will say, “Salvation comes from the Lord.”” (Jonah 2:9).

Jonah recommits himself afresh to following God.

In just one verse, Jonah uses the phrase “I will” three times:

- 1) ‘I will sacrifice.’
- 2) ‘I will make good’.
- 3) ‘I will say’.

Choosing to have a relationship with someone is an act of the will. I *choose* to be married. I *choose* to be part of Goldstone Church. I *choose* to engage with God with every part of my personality.

Restoring a relationship with God requires an act of the will. For example:

1. *‘I will Sacrifice’*. I will renew my relationship with God by choosing to engage in authentic worship. I *choose* to worship God with all my heart, soul, mind and strength.
2. *‘I will Make Good’*. My actions will be consistent with my words. What I have said I will do for God, will be matched with what I will actively do for God. I *choose* to make good.
3. *‘I will Say’*. I will be proactive in reflecting God to others. I will show everyone I meet that God is a priority in my life. The source of my salvation is the God with whom I have a personal relationship.

Earlier in Jonah’s life, God had called him to be a prophet and he had accepted that calling. But Jonah turned away and tried to run away from God. He had gone his own way. But in the belly of a fish, Jonah recommitted himself to God.

Jonah was as good as dead, both physically and spiritually. But when it seemed there was no hope, God was there. In the same way that God sought a relationship with Jonah, He seeks a relationship with you and me.

CONCLUSION

How would you describe your relationship with God? Do you have a distant or non-existent relationship with God? If so, please use Jonah as an example. Look closely at the steps that Jonah took to restore his relationship with God.

Then consider ...

- Returning. God says, “return to me, and I will return to you”.
- Reflecting. No matter how dark your circumstances, God can provide freedom and release.
- Repenting. God seeks a heart that turns away from the past and, instead, seeks to follow God’s way.
- Renewing. A practical act of the will - to *choose* God’s way, expressed in worship, in actions and in words.

God seeks to have a vibrant relationship with each one of us. When we turn to God afresh, He will take us from the gasp of a prayer in the middle of the darkest storm, and take us to standing on dry land.

This week, let us live our lives afresh for God.

Amen