

A warm welcome to our Sunday morning service. It's the 3rd of May 2020. I greet you in the name of the Lord Jesus, from Tabor Baptist Church in South Wales. This morning we're going to seek God in prayer, then we're going to read the Bible and hear a message from God's word. Shall we bow in a word of prayer:

"Almighty and ever blessed God, we come before You with thanksgiving in our hearts. We thank you that you are the Creator of the ends of the earth. We sing hallelujah to You because You have made all things well. We praise you Heavenly Father, not only that you are our Creator, but we thank you that you are our Redeemer. We thank you for our Lord Jesus Christ who has rescued us from the pit. We thank you that we have been placed on a rock that we are secure in Him. And Lord we thank you for the precious gift of the Holy Spirit who makes all these things real to us; who applies the work of redemption to our lives. Father, we thank You that You have brought us into the church of Jesus Christ. And as one company of Your people, we worship You this day. We thank You that we join with the angels in heaven, the church triumphant in heaven, and all our brothers and sisters around the globe in worship of You. But Lord at the outset of this day we confess our sins to you. We confess Heavenly Father that we have not lived as we ought to live. There are many things that we have said and that we have done and that we have thought that are wrong: through negligence, through weakness or through our own deliberate fault... we have highly offended you. Father, we are sorry and ask You to cleanse us and forgive us. We thank You, and we praise You that there is grace and that there is mercy... that you are a Loving God and that you do restore and forgive all who fear Your name. And so we thank you that we can come with boldness into your presence, but oh Lord with some trepidation. And though Lord we come mourning over our sin we thank you yet we can come with boldness to you. And we can even rejoice in Your presence this day. We pray God that as we look again into your Holy Word that You would search our hearts and at the same time You would warm our hearts... that You would speak Lord into the depths of our being. And that we would know that God has had dealings with us. We pray heavenly Father for receptive hearts. We would hate to be people who look into the mirror of your word and then afterwards quickly forget what we've seen. May we see ourselves, and may You bring us into conformity with the word of God. We pray again for the world in which we live with all the suffering and with all the dying... with all the fear and worry. Oh Father in heaven we pray that you would pity this world. And we pray for your church that you might revive it. Lord Revive us we pray, and we ask that we might become a burning shining lamp in this earth that many would hear the gospel, and believe. Lord come we pray, and make the gospel run. May you do great things that Jesus Christ might be praised. We ask all this in his name. Amen."

Please, would you turn with me to the book of Jonah. We're going to read the last verse of chapter one and then we're going to read the whole of chapter two. On Tuesday and our prayer meeting we looked at chapter 4 and we considered Jonah "shut up to himself" in all of his selfishness and anger. But today we're going to consider Jonah behind closed doors. shut up in a fish. So please turn with me to Jonah chapter one, beginning to read at verse, 17.

17 Now the LORD had prepared a great fish to swallow Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.

2 Then Jonah prayed to the LORD his God from the fish's belly. 2 And he said:

*"I cried out to the LORD because of my affliction,
And He answered me.*

*"Out of the belly of Sheol I cried,
And You heard my voice.*

3 For You cast me into the deep,

*Into the heart of the seas,
 And the floods surrounded me;
 All Your billows and Your waves passed over me.
 4 Then I said, 'I have been cast out of Your sight;
 Yet I will look again toward Your holy temple.'
 5 The waters surrounded me, even to my soul;
 The deep closed around me;
 Weeds were wrapped around my head.
 6 I went down to the ^[a]moorings of the mountains;
 The earth with its bars closed behind me forever;
 Yet You have brought up my life from the pit,
 O LORD, my God.
 7 "When my soul fainted within me,
 I remembered the LORD;
 And my prayer went up to You,
 Into Your holy temple.
 8 "Those who regard worthless idols
 Forsake their own ^[b]Mercy.
 9 But I will sacrifice to You
 With the voice of thanksgiving;
 I will pay what I have vowed.
 Salvation is of the LORD."
 10 So the LORD spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land.*

Sermon

Now over the past few weeks we've been looking at the theme "Behind closed doors." Last week we considered Joseph behind closed doors, there in prison for perhaps up to 12 years. And we learned the wonderful truth, that though men meant it for evil, God meant it for good.... to save Joseph and his family for famine and to bless the world. At the same time our eyes were pointed to the Lord Jesus Christ as we considered the humiliation of Joseph, and then his exaltation. This pointed us to the humiliation of our Lord Jesus.. the depths he went to and and then we were pointed to the heights he was raised to. Men meant his death upon the cross for evil reasons, but God meant it for good. But this morning we look at Jonah. He is behind closed doors, as it were, he shut up in a fish, and the title of my message this morning is this: "Out to the depths", and it's based on verse six of Jonah chapter two. Jonah says this in his prayer. *"I went down to the moorings of the mountains, the earth with its bars closed behind me forever. Yet, You have brought me up my life from the pit oh Lord, My God."* So we're going to see the wonderful way God restored Jonah he was in the depths, both spiritually and physically.. for God was to raise him up both spiritually and physically. And then we're going to see how this incident points to our Lord Jesus Christ. It may seem strange to you to think of how Jonah, a disobedient servant to the Lord, could in any way be a type of Christ. You can understand Joseph was a type of the Lord, but as we'll see Jonah was too. You see Jesus spoke of the sign of Jonah: Jonah's three days and three nights in the belly of a fish was a representation of Jesus' 3 days in the tomb. The incident typified His death, burial, and resurrection. So this morning we're going to consider first of all, two things

- 1) "Into the depths" and then
- 2) "Out of the depths" And then thirdly
- 3) "Looking up to Jesus". First of all

"Into the depths" You know the story very well. The Runaway Prophet, disobedient to God's voice turns his back on the living God. He wants to flee from His presence, and instead of going northeast to Nineveh where God commanded him to go he seems to go almost in the opposite direction. He tries to go west as far as possible away from God all the way to Tarshish in Spain.

And then chapter one, we find him on a boat. He's asleep. Perhaps that's due to mental exhaustion because he's been going against the clear revealed will of God and he's just overcome now and so exhausted that he's asleep. Or perhaps it's the false sleep of peace. Well God sends a mighty storm while Jonah is upon that boat. And strangely we read that he's still asleep even in the midst of the storm. That would indicate that it's not the sweet sleep of false peace, but that he is mentally exhausted and so overcome that he's just out of it. And then we read in chapter one something very ironic happens. We read that ungodly idolatrous mariners wake him up and call upon him to pray to his God !! What a wake up call that was to Jonah !! Now you know the story well... Jonah owned up to his guilt, and believed the only solution to the situation was for the Mariners to throw him overboard. And in throwing him overboard the sea will become calm and they will be saved. Reluctantly, they do what he says and the sea becomes calm. Now, my question is this was Jonah repentant when he owned up to his guilt and said "Throw me overboard" ? Or was this in fact an act of suicide? Of course it wasn't himself, throwing himself over, it was assisted suicide. I would suggest to you that the book of Jonah gives us the impression that this man suffers from dark and depressive thoughts. You see not only in chapter one does he show this but in chapter four also. In verse three he asked God to take his life from him. This happened again in verse eight he says to the Lord, "*It is better for me to die than to live*". And when the Lord challenges him and says, "*Is it right for you to be angry?*" He responds, "*It is right for me to be angry, even to death!*" Jonah is in a bad state. He's struggling with his emotions and with his relationship with God. He's feeling that life is pointless. He doesn't want to fulfil the calling that God has given to him and he would rather die. Perhaps he's fatalistic and he's thinking when he says to them to throw him overboard: '*I know I deserve death and well it's just gonna happen, so let it happen*'. However, God has plans for his runaway servant, for his backslidden servant. God in His mercy and His grace prepares a great fish and that grey fish swallows Jonah. **And then he begins to pray. And at his lowest point in the deep darkness of the belly of that great fish. Hope begins to revive. There's repentance, taking place. And Jonah is gloriously delivered.**

Perhaps this message finds you in the depths this morning, very low... struggling over different issues in your life. Perhaps this message, even meets with somebody who would rather die than live. You know this can be a very real condition of the Christian. The Psalmist often speaks of being in the depths. "*Out of the depths of I cry to you O God*". Now when we're in that low condition we need to ask questions as to why I'm in this state. The answer is never simple. And the answer is different for different people. For some it may be bereavement of a husband or a wife... After years of marriage you just don't want to go on living anymore. Perhaps for another person it's a tragedy or an accident in the family and I just can't cope with life anymore. For another person hopes have been dashed. A person had high hopes for good things happening in the future but all the expectations are not realised, and so he or she cannot see the point in carrying on in life. For another person it's those ongoing personal trials, maybe family trials that eat away at you and it's hard to cope. No the minds of people react to different situations and different people in different ways. Some experience profound depression and it may not be because of some tragedy or some big event happening in their life. It could just be to do with their DNA and their physical and psychological makeup. Certain factors happen that just bring that person very low. But circumstances do not always determine how one reacts and determine your feelings. Jeremiah was thrown down a pit. That must have been very hard but he trusted the Lord. Think of Joseph in a prison, even there after long years, he hoped in the Lord. Then think of Paul and Silas in the dungeon, in the prison cell, in the darkness and yet rejoicing and singing to the Lord. These men... Jeremiah, Joseph, Paul and Silas were not overwhelmed by their very difficult circumstances. But other great saints of God have been. We think of Job, you read the whole book of Job, and he pours out the agony of his heart. We are all different and we all react in different ways. And one person's degree of suffering may be far greater than another person's degree of suffering.

But what about Jonah? Why did he have these suicidal thoughts? Well we know from chapter one it was because of his rejection of God's will, his non acceptance of the commission that God gave to him. There was rebellion in his heart. And when the child of God and the servant of God deliberately goes against God's will there will be an effect upon his spirit, a crushing effect. The Holy Spirit of God was striving with him. His conscience also reminded him of his sin. And the heavy hand of God the Father was upon him. Now if such a person leaves off prayer and tries to escape from God as Jonah did his low suicidal feelings can be traced back to this faulty relationship with God. It is all out of sorts. So we must always ask the question: What is the reason for my low condition and for my anxieties? What is the reason for my depression? Is it linked to my spiritual condition? have I left off prayer? Am I backslidden? Am I disobedient? Am I wilfully sinning? Remember David when David failed to confess his sin after his adultery with Bathsheba he lost all of his physical vitality and was utterly depressed. Friends in order to get to the proper remedy we need a correct diagnosis. Now it may be that our low condition is due to physical factors, or it may be that is due to spiritual matters. We need to be honest with ourselves and honest with God. For Jonah the correct diagnosis was that his low state was directly the result of his sin. So then we've seen him going into the depths and it's been sad. But now let's consider Jonah coming out to the dark depths.

"Out of the depths:" Can you imagine what it would have been like being tossed over that boat into a surging raging sea?... thrown into the depths and going down beneath the waves? What fear ! What terror! What panic ! But God was not finished with this servant. Jonah was God's child and through this awful chastening experience God would use it to restore him and deliver him, and to give him a second chance to fulfil his commission. We can't imagine what was going through Jonah's mind as he began to sink beneath the waves, and yet God had a good purpose for him. We read in chapter one verse 17 that God prepared a great fish to rescue him. You see the God who commands the sea and who sent the tempest also commands the creatures of the sea. Later in the book of Jonah we read how God is sovereign over all his creation. In chapter four God prepares a plant to give Jonah shade, and then he prepares a worm to nor away at that plant. And then he prepares a vehement east wind that together with the midday suns beats on Jonah's head. So throughout this book we see God, using the elements, and using creatures for his own purposes. Those who have difficulty believing in the story of Jonah and are wondering whether it could be historical just do a Google search and discover incidents in history where men have been swallowed by great fishes and survived. But really, you don't actually need to do that. If you believe in an Almighty God you should have no difficulty in coming to the conclusion that this Almighty God is able to use a fish to swallow a man, and to preserve his life for three days and three nights: even in the darkness, even in the slime, and even in the movement of muscles, the contracting the muscles, the acids, and the lack of oxygen. Because God is God. God spoke this world into existence. God made this vast universe. Cannot He preserve one of His creatures, a human, in a miraculous way? Why should we have difficulty about this? Now we're going to consider Jonah coming out to the depths. How did he come out to the depths? Well in verse one and verse two of chapter two, we read: **Jonah prayed.** That was the beginning of the deliverance. That was the turning point in his life. He prayed and God heard. *"Then Jonah prayed to the Lord his God from the fish's belly"* Notice that he hadn't prayed before then. He said, *"I cried out to the Lord because of my affliction. And he answered me."* Friends sometimes we need to be brought to the end of ourselves before we ever really begin to pray !!

Think of August 2010 when 33 Chilean miners were found, stuck 2800 feet below the earth after their mine had collapsed. They were three miles from the opening of the original shaft. And they were to remain there for 69 days. It was August when the shaft collapsed, and it was only in October that they were freed. Miraculously, they were found... An 18 inch bore went down and eventually reached them. Then a hole was opened up and a capsule sent down and all 33 men survived. But for me what was miraculous was that there was a man of prayer called Hose amongst these 33 men. And he taught the others to pray every day at midday. At 12 he help a

prayer meeting. He preached the gospel to them. And these men in the desperation began to call upon the name of the Lord, and 22 of them professed faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. It was when they were in the depths, in the heart of the earth that they prayed !! Sometimes God brings us to the end of ourselves before we pray

Now Jonah's prayer reads like a poem doesn't it? Perhaps he constructed it when he was vomited up on the Mediterranean beach. Who knows when he wrote it? But you know the words that we have here we can be sure reflect the real sentiment of the prayer, which he prayed when he was in the belly of the whale. He was a man who understood the scriptures for he was steeped in the scriptures. He was a prophet and so he uses the language of the Psalms, in his prayer. For example, compare the words of verses three, four and six with Psalm 69. Verses 3,4, & 6 speak of being cast to the deep... The waves and billows of God going over you.... Being cast out of God's sight and going down to the moorings of the mountains with the earth with its bars closing behind you.. Compare this with Psalm 69. *"Save me O God, for the waters have come up to my neck. I sink in deep mire where there is no standing. I have come into deep waters, where the floods overflow me..."* Verse 13: *"But as for me, my prayer is to You, O LORD, in the acceptable time; O God, in the multitude of Your mercy, Hear me in the truth of Your salvation."¹⁴ Deliver me out of the mire, and let me not sink; Let me be delivered from those who hate me, and out of the deep waters. ¹⁵ Let not the floodwater overflow me, nor let the deep swallow me up; and let not the pit shut its mouth on me."* You see when Jonah composed his prayer he used poetic language to express what was really happening to him. Psalm 30 verses two and three also give the same sentiment: *"Oh Lord my God, I cried out to you and you healed me. Oh Lord You brought my soul up from the grave. You've kept me alive that I should not go down to the pit."* And so we could go on. There are so many Psalms that express this experience of being absolutely overwhelmed by your circumstances to the point of death, and God raising his servant up. But how was Jonah delivered from the depths? How did he come out of the depths? Brothers and sisters it began with a prayer, a prayer informed by scriptural truth, a prayer from the heart, a prayer of confession. He confessed the fact that it was God who had cast him out. In effect this was a confession of sin was just like the prodigal saying, "Lord I've sinned against you and have sinned against heaven. I'm not worthy but receive me back". So let's consider this prayer:

Verse three: *"For **you** cast me into the deep. into the heart of the seas, and the flood surrounded me all your willows. All **your** billows and **your** waves passed over me. Then I said, I have been cast out of **your** sight."* Notice the language that Jonah uses. He's acknowledging that this is the chastening of the Lord. It's not just that he's been thrown overboard and naturally the waves go over the top of him. No he says it's God's waves, it's God's pillows. It's the waves of God, His anger, the consequences of His chastening hand. All that he is experiencing is God doing it to him. *"I have been cast out of your sight"* because of my disobedience. You see, he's acknowledging guilt before God. And if we're in a backslidden state that's the first thing that we must do: acknowledge our guilt before the Lord. And then we can hope as we've already begun so look up. You see Jonah begins to look to the place of hope. Look at verse four: *"I will look again towards your holy temple."* Look at verse seven, *"When my soul fainted within me, I remembered the Lord, and my prayer went up to you, into your holy temple."* Twice he mentions the temple. He was the prophet in the northern kingdom in Samaria. He was a prophet at a time where there had been great prosperity, great expansion of the northern kingdom. But his heart and his mind did not turn to Samaria, the capital of the northern kingdom. His heart and his mind turned to Jerusalem in the south, to the temple. Why? Because he understood that the temple was the place where atonement was made for sin, where sacrifices were made. The temple was the place of God's presence, where the ark was and where the mercy seat was. The temple was the place that God ordained where his word should be preached. It was the place of hope. And so Jonah lifts up his eyes to the temple and looks towards the temple in his mind's eye. And he prays with faith. Yes he evidences hope in his prayer and prays with faith. He says in verse 6 *"Yet you brought up my life in the pit, or Lord, my God,"* What faith ! What confidence ! And then he says

this in verse eight: *"Those who regard worthless idols forsake their own mercy, **but I will sacrifice to you**".* He's saying this before the time when will be vomited out to the fish.. *"But I will sacrifice to you with the voice of thanksgiving. I will pay what I have vowed. Salvation is of the Lord."* This is glorious. He's come from absolute hopelessness and despair, from all those suicidal tendencies to confidence and hope. He's seen again in his mind, the loving kindness of God: God's willingness to receive back a guilty sinner, he's looked at the temple, he's looked to atonement, he's looked at the thought of forgiveness, through sacrifice, he's looked at the gracious character of God and says with confidence "I will sacrifice to you, with the voice of thanksgiving I will pay what I have vowed I will serve you. I promise to serve you and I will serve you." He says all this before he ever sees the light of day. Whilst he still in a deep, dark cavern of the fishy stomach he sees the light! Hope revives; he's restored and God speaks to the fish, and it vomits him onto dry land. How do we come out to the depths? Well it is **God who brings us out to the depths**. Remember when it's a spiritual situation, when our problem is spiritual...the solution is spiritual. And we must pray to God. I must look to the cross of Christ. Jonah looked at the temple. But I must look to Jesus. Remember that Jesus in John chapter 2 refers to his own body as the temple, and time and again he would say things like this: "that they could destroy his body. they could destroy the temple but after three days he would raise it again" And he was speaking of his body! So we look to Jesus Christ His death, his burial, and his resurrection, all that he has done on our behalf. This is the only place of hope

How good to read in the Psalms of God's servants coming out of the depths and thanking God. This can be your experience too. In Psalm 116 we read: *"I love the LORD, because He has heard my voice and my supplications.² Because He has inclined His ear to me, therefore I will call upon Him as long as I live. The pains of death surrounded me, and the pangs of Sheol laid hold of me; I found trouble and sorrow.⁴ Then I called upon the name of the LORD: "O LORD, I implore You, deliver my soul!"⁵ Gracious is the LORD, and righteous; Yes, our God is merciful.⁶ The LORD preserves the simple; I was brought low, and He saved me."*

So brothers and sisters we've seen Jonah, going into the depths. And we've seen him coming out of the depths. Maybe this is a word for you. You are his child. You feel his chastening hand upon you. You perhaps feel backslidden. Don't give up, don't give in, don't despair. Remember that is by grace that you were saved. And that by grace you will be restored. Pray to him, confess your sin to him. Whatever the blockage is, whatever the problem is bring it to the Lord. Come to the cross and look to the resurrection. Yes look to Jesus. And may God remember you too.....And then lastly, let's really look up to Jesus because this passage is meant to point us to Jesus.

Looking up to Jesus: In Matthew chapter 12 verses 39 to 40 Jesus said that what happened to Jonah was a sign. He called it the sign of Jonah. He said this: *"For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth."* What happened to Jonah was figurative of Christ's death, burial, and resurrection. You may say why was Jonah, an example of disobedience used to prefigure Jesus the death and resurrection of Jesus. Why not Joseph? Joseph was totally obedient to God and only ever did the will of his Father. But listen. Jonah is chosen as Jesus became our sin bearer. He stood in our place and identified with us in our sin. So Jonah was chosen. Jesus accepted the death penalty for he took our sin. Now the wages of sin is death... and Jesus accepted even this and he truly sank to the lowest point. He truly experienced being cast away from God as He was abandoned on the Cross. Yes he sank into hell itself as he drank the full cup of God's wrath. You see Psalm 69 that we quoted earlier is a messianic Psalm. In that Psalm we read these words about our Lord Jesus: Verses 20 and 21 *"Reproach has broken my heart. I am full of heaviness. I looked for pity, and there was none; and for comforters but I found none. They also gave me gall my food and for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink."* In this Psalm we see the depths of Christ's love for us for we see the extent to which he went for us. Love beyond degree. Love unbounding; complete eternal love for sinners. Oh how he was willing to go to the depths of

human experience and beyond by being punished for our sins. And the Father in heaven accepted His perfect sacrifice. It was a sweet smelling aroma before him. Jesus fulfilled all the demands of the law. He met all the righteous requirements of God. And God saw what he had done: a finished work: a sacrifice completed for our sin. Atonement made! and it pleased Him. Brothers and sisters our eyes need to look up to Jesus, to all that he has done for us. Jonah looked to the temple. We look to Christ. On the third day having sunk to the depths, descending into the abyss; on the third day, He rose triumphant from the dead. He gave His life and then he took it again! *"Oh death, where is your sting? Oh grave, where is your victory?"* Our message today to a dying world where 10s of thousands have died in the United States, and where 10s of thousands have died in Europe.... where on every continent there's great fear our message is this: That Jesus Christ the Son of God has come into the world and defeated sin and death, and the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. There's nothing better than to have Christ in your life and Christ as your Lord. To; such He gives the gift of eternal life ! Do you find yourself in the depths today? Perhaps today you have seen Jesus and that he alone, who bore the wrath of God, who went to the depths of hell for you, was also raised Him from the dead for you. He is a living compassionate, loving Saviour willing to save all who call upon him. We're going to sing him in a minute and the song is entitled "Oh Lord, my rock and my Redeemer" s. And these are some of the words from the hymn.

"Your Grace a well too deep to fathom.
Your love exceeds the heavens reach
Your truth a fount of perfect wisdom
My highest goal, and my unending need.
Oh Lord, my rock and my Redeemer,
Gracious saviour of my ruined life
My guilt and cross laid on your shoulders
In my place you suffered bled and died.
You rose, the grave and death are conquered.
You broke my bonds of sin and shame."

Is there hope today? In the midst of this coronavirus outbreak, let us be sure there is hope in Jesus Christ, hope through His death, burial, and resurrection. May you put your life in his hands. Jonah said this, "I will sacrifice to you with a voice of thanksgiving. I will pay what I have vowed." May you and I say "Oh Jesus I have promised to serve you to the end" and may you and I be able to say as Jonah said. **"You have brought my life up from the pit, oh Lord, My God."** Amen.