

Armagh Baptist Church
Sunday 8th August 2010 – 6:30pm
'The Preparation of God: Learning through Chastening'
Jonah 1:17-2:10

Introduction

Let me remind you of the story so far. Last week we saw that...

1. God had a purpose for Jonah's life – He was to go and preach to the Great City of Nineveh in Assyria. (1:2) – (In modern-day Iraq).

But Jonah ran away (1:3) and decided he was going in exactly the opposite direction to Tarshish in Spain. He found a boat in the Port of Joppa, going to Tarshish, so he paid the fare, and got on board. He was away!

2. But God had a purpose in letting Jonah get away on that ship. God doesn't force us to do anything, but he has his own way of teaching us what is best for us. Then God sent a Storm, and we saw that...

3. God had a purpose in sending the storm into Jonah's life.

It was to convict Jonah of his disobedience.

We saw that going our own way is sin – and that we must repent of our sin and go God's way instead.

We realized that if there's a storm in our life at the moment, then God has put it there for a reason – he was a purpose behind it. But even when Jonah did realize that he had sinned, the storm, instead of dying down, actually grew worse and worse!

4. But God had a purpose in allowing the storm to continue.

(i) To bring Jonah to the point where he cast his whole life into God's hands, for God to do with him exactly as he pleased.

And so the storm didn't die down until Jonah was cast upon the mercy of the waves. His life was now in God's hands, to do with as he pleased.

(ii) God also allowed the storm to continue for another reason - It was so that he could save the heathen sailors.

Despite Jonah's disobedience and poor witness, God could still reach and save these sailors – and that's what he did!

So we finished last week with Jonah hitting the waves, and the heathen sailors trusting in God. But tonight we come to Jonah 1:17 – 2:10.

What was to become of Jonah? It's like one of those serials on T.V. – full of action packed drama. You could slot one of Eastenders famous 'duff-duffs' in at the end of Jonah ch.1:16 – because we're left with a cliff hanger at that point in the story. It always ends at the nail-biting bit each week, doesn't it?

The hero of the story is in terrible danger. What's going to happen to him?

Come back next week and find out! And everybody goes ‘Augh!’ But when you’re watching a T.V. serial and you know that it’s going to be on for the next 5 or 6 weeks, with a lot more episodes, you know at the back of your mind that the hero’s going to be alright – he’ll get out of this tight corner somehow – at least for a while – otherwise the story-line would end.

So OK, we all know the story of Jonah and the great fish – we’ve heard it from childhood – we know what’s going to happen. But Jonah didn’t!

1. Jonah thought he was dead! (1:12-15)

When Jonah hit those 30 foot waves in the middle of a terrifying storm, as far as he was concerned, he was finished! This was the end! He would soon be dead!

As far as the Sailors were concerned, when they lifted him up and threw him overboard, they thought he was dead – there was no hope for him! Just look at how they prayed in ch.1:14. They were convinced he was dead!

As far as God was concerned, He would have had every right to take Jonah’s life there and then. Because Jonah had sinned, he had disobeyed God, and in God’s book: *‘the wages of sin is death!’* (Romans 6:23), or as it is put in the Old Testament: *‘the soul that sins, it shall die.’* (Ezekiel 18:4). Or in Jeremiah 31:30 *‘Everyone will die for his own sin.’*

Jonah had sinned against God – he deserved to die.

You and I have sinned against God – we deserve to die.

We sin and disobey God practically every day: As Romans 3:23 puts it:

‘All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.’

We deserve to die because of our sins – the death sentence has been passed on all of us! *‘The soul that sins, it shall die!’*

Each one of us is dying in our sins this evening, if we’re outside of Christ.

But as Jonah was resigning himself to death...

As he was going under for the third time...

As he began to sink, ...and sink, ... and sink,

...and as he went down, ... and down, ...and down...

suddenly he stopped!

Suddenly he realized he was stationary – he had stopped moving!

He opened his eyes...maybe he pinched himself...

I really doubt if he knew where he was, because no-one had ever been

there before!

But he knew one thing – he knew he was alive!

2. **Jonah realized he was alive! (1:17)**

He should have been dead – but he was alive!

Jonah didn't know where he was, but we do (Read 1:17).

He was in the belly of a great fish!

'The Lord provided (the Lord had prepared) a great fish to swallow Jonah!'

We don't need to get into all the speculation of what kind of a fish this was, that could hold a man in its stomach. Some people talk about Jonah and the whale, and scientists will tell you that there are no whales that could swallow a man alive, and they're probably right. But the point is the Bible doesn't say it was a whale – it was a great fish, which the Lord had specially prepared to be able to swallow Jonah alive. And if God could create the whole world we see around us with all its millions of species of animals, then He had no difficulty preparing a great fish to swallow Jonah.

God had sent a **storm** to **punish** Jonah, but even as He was **punishing** Jonah, he was also **preparing** a great fish to **save** Jonah.

Think of the parallel here:

God sent His Son to take the punishment for our sin on the cross at Calvary. But even as he was punishing His Son, the Lord Jesus, for our sin,

He was at the very same time, preparing a great way for us to be saved! Isn't that amazing?!

Isaiah 53:6 – *'We all like sheep have gone astray,*

Each of us has turned to his own way...'

– We have all sinned – just like Jonah!

*'...and the Lord has laid on **Him** the iniquity of us all...'*

*'...and by **His wounds we are healed!**'*

So even as God was **punishing** His Son,

He was at the same time **preparing** for us a way of **salvation**.

John 3:16-17 – *'For God so loved the world that He gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him **shall not perish** but have eternal life.*

*For God did not send his Son into the world **to condemn** the world, **but to save the world through Him.**'*

Even as you are sinking deeper and deeper into your sin,
God has prepared a Great Saviour for you!
Are you trusting in Him tonight? Have you come to rest in Him?
The Lord Jesus Christ, God's Son, can be your Saviour!
If you put your trust in Him, though you should be dead, you will find
that you are very much alive!

That's what Jonah did – even though he was in the belly of a great fish,
he realized that he was very much alive, and he was so grateful to be
alive!

He was alive for a reason – because God had so much more to teach
him, and so much more for him to do.

3. Jonah had more to learn (ch.2)

...and so have we! We may be saved, but we have so much more to
learn!

Sometimes, even as soon as we're saved, God brings such
circumstances into our lives straight away, that we begin to learn very
quickly indeed!

We learn best, what we learn from personal experience.
We learn best, what we learn through difficult experiences – through
trials, through the hard times, the tough times. Someone has said,
'*Experience is what you get when things **don't** turn out the way you
expect.*'

Jonah was about to spend 3 days and 3 nights in the belly of a great
fish:

- Not the most delightful of surroundings
- Not the most pleasant of circumstances
- Probably the smell of rotting fish all around him
- But he was going to learn a lot in those 3 days!

God had used ***the storm to punish*** Jonah.
Now he was using ***the fish to prepare*** Jonah.

Jonah had already got to the point in last week's episode where he was
ready for God to do with his life exactly as he chose. (1:12)
He was ready to cast his life into God's hands.
And when he hit the waves, the storm ceased.

But if God was going to use him now in his service then there was some
preparation work to be done on Jonah inside that fish. God had still a

job for Jonah to do (as we will see in ch.3) but Jonah had some lessons to learn.

Have you got to the point where you are willing for God to use your life just as He would choose? Do you really mean what you say when you call Him 'Lord' of your life? Well, if you have got to that point, then let me tell you from God's Word, and from personal experience, that God has some preparation work to do on you first. You have a lot of lessons to learn.

God teaches us by disciplining us (that's the word the NIV uses).

Or God teaches us by chastening us (the word that the AV uses).

The picture is of a parent disciplining a child.

It appears in passages like Hebrews 12:5-11, John 15:1-2, James 1:2-4.

When God teaches us lessons through difficult experiences, He is not punishing us for our sins; rather He is preparing us for His Service.

Hebrews 12 tells us that God disciplines those whom he loves – his children. It's actually evidence that you are saved, if God is chastening you. He's doing it in love. He's preparing you for a greater task ahead. Don't worry too much yet what that task is going to be, just be sure to learn your lessons well now!

Maybe, tonight, you're asking, 'What's God trying to teach me?'

'What lessons does He want me to learn?'

Well, let me briefly outline what Jonah learned.

He learned 3 things about prayer:

1. He learned to pray again (v.1) –

'From inside the fish Jonah prayed...'

Remember he had been out of the habit of praying, due to his disobedience – since he was running from the Lord's presence.

And he didn't have time to pray in the storm – it was all happening so quickly!

If you haven't found time to pray regularly in your everyday life, how do you expect to find time to pray whenever the storms or trouble comes?

We need to get into the habit of regular praying before the storm comes, or the Lord will have to bring us to the point of despair to get us to pray! (v.7)

2. He learned to cry again (v.2) – 'You listened to my cry.'

Sometimes God has to break us before he can use us.

For example in Isaiah ch.38:1-5 King Hezekiah cried out to God, and God said '*I have heard your prayer, I have seen your tears...*'

And God answered his prayers on that occasion.
Maybe we think we're too big to cry? Maybe we're just too proud to cry?

Tears move God's heart – he notices when we cry.

When did you last cry out to God in prayer?

*'Humble yourselves under God's mighty hand,
and in due time He will lift you up.'*

Do we cry out to God as a church, for him to save people through our ministry here?

3. He learned to get to the point of prayer (v.2)

'In my distress I called to the Lord, and he answered me.'

Because Jonah was praying out of distress, he rapidly got to the point with God. When we're in real need, we get to the point quickly.

God doesn't want to hear fine-sounding flowery prayers; He just wants us to honestly tell Him what's on our heart.

The shortest prayer is 'Help me, Lord!' but that's the one that God delights to answer!

He learned 2 things about trials:

4. He learned that what he had come through was all of God (v. 3)

'You hurled me into the deep...'

'Your waves and breakers swept over me.'

We need to learn that what comes into our lives is *permitted* by God, and that He has a *purpose* behind whatever it is.

It's **His** chastening, and it comes from **His** hand.

Instead of becoming bitter because of our circumstances, we need to ask God what it is He is trying to teach us through them and respond positively, not negatively.

5. He learned that when all seemed hopeless, there was still a way back to God. (vs.4-7)

But it's God's way, not our way.

For Jonah, it was via *'His holy Temple.'* (v.4 and v.7).

The Temple was the place of sacrifice for sin. There was no way that Jonah could physically get there, but in his mind that's what he was thinking about.

But the good news for us is that we don't need to go to a Temple in Jerusalem or anywhere else in order to have our sins forgiven.

We don't even need to go physically to Calvary, to the foot of a physical cross in order to have our sins forgiven, we go to Christ, the One who has already taken our sins there, and paid the price for them, and through simply trusting in Him and his finished work there, by faith, we

are forgiven.

Perhaps I'm speaking to someone tonight and you're a backslider?
The only way back to God is through the Lord Jesus Christ.

Through confessing your sins,

Through receiving afresh his forgiveness and cleansing for your sins,
That's the only way to get back to God, the same way as you came to faith the first time.

That way is always open to you, because Jehovah (the LORD v.6 & v.7) is always faithful to his Covenant with you, even when you've been unfaithful to Him. He is the Covenant-making and the Covenant-keeping God. He will never completely reject His Child.

Then Jonah learned 2 things about Obedience:

6. He learned that Obedience is the only way to experience God's blessing (v.8)

'Those who cling to worthless idols forfeit the grace that could be theirs.'

Jonah had forfeited grace / God's blessing by stepping out of God's will; by clinging to the idol of his own will. What idol are you clinging to? Jonah had to learn this lesson the hard way. Must we?

7. He learned that grateful obedience was the only adequate response to what God had done for him (v.9)

As we saw last week, God doesn't coldly demand our obedience, gratitude and sacrifice. It should come gratefully as a result of all that He has done for us. We deserved to die, but the Lord saved us!

Jonah deserved to die, but God spared him. Now, grateful for that, he was eager to fulfill his vow to serve God in response.

In the Book of Romans, Paul spent 11 chapters talking about God's grace towards us in salvation.

At the end of ch.11 he bursts into praise and thanksgiving and gratitude to God (Romans 11:33-36).

And then in ch.12:1-2 he urges us to respond in obedient, sacrificial service to God, in view of all that God, in his mercy, has done for us.

8. Ultimately, Jonah learned that 'Salvation is of the Lord' (v.9)

It's God who saves whoever He chooses, whenever He chooses to do so.

- Jonah didn't deserve it, but God saved him.
- The Sailors didn't deserve it, but God saved them.
- The Ninevites didn't deserve it; but God would soon save them too!

Conclusion:

Having learned that lesson, Jonah was now ready for service.

The period of affliction was over. He had learned his lesson:

- Salvation / Deliverance *is* of the Lord.

So when God was ready - in His time - 3 days and 3 nights later,

God spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah on to dry land.

Perhaps that period of difficult circumstances is still going on in your life?

Well are you learning these lessons about prayer, about trials, about obedience, and about the grace of God in salvation itself?

When you've learned them, when you're ready, God will bring this time of preparation to an end, and then you'll be ready for His service. Amen.