

# The Prayer of a Drowning Runaway

by J. Glyn Owen

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*The sermon explores the story of Jonah and the importance of seeking God's presence, highlighting the futility of rebelling against God and the value of experiencing God's presence.*

**Duration:** 52:01

**Scripture:** Psalm 27:8, Jonah 1:17 - 2:2, Jonah 2:4, Matthew 7:7, Luke 15:11-32

**Topics:** "Prayer"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the events that took place both outside and inside the belly of the fish when Jonah was in the water. He acknowledges that there are uncertainties and that he cannot be dogmatic about the exact sequence of events. The sermon focuses on Jonah's realization of being banished from God's sight and his decision to turn back towards God's holy temple. The speaker draws parallels between Jonah's experience and the parable of the prodigal son, emphasizing the importance of recognizing one's need for God and seeking His face.

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## Transcript

It's a joy to be together again on another Lord's Day, and particularly to have a number of folk visiting us for the occasion. We are rejoiced to have you, as Mr. MacLeod has already indicated, and we trust that God will make this time a very blessed one for you and for all of us. And again we say to the young choristers a very warm welcome to Knox.

We hope you'll not forget this morning. We won't. I would also like to add a word of thanks to Mr. Ewan MacLean, whose artistry we always appreciate at various seasons of the year, and he has been responsible for decorating, as you will see, and once again the touch of his artistic hand is upon everything.

We thank you, Mr. MacLean. Well now, would you kindly have your Bibles open with you, and I think you'll find that helpful for an understanding of this second chapter in the book of the prophet Jonah, to which we turn. Our subject this morning, the prayer of a runaway prophet.

This particular chapter brings us abruptly into confrontation with probably the most holy supernatural feature in the entire book. Reading the last verse of chapter 1, as we did earlier on, we there read, The Lord provided a great fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was inside the fish three days and three nights. And then in the first verse of chapter 2, from inside the fish Jonah prayed to the Lord his God.

He said, In my distress I called to the Lord, and he answered me. From the depths of the grave I called for help, and you listened to me. Jonah lived to see the light of a better day, but he never forgot this experience.

How could he? Now, I don't want to spend a long time with the fish as fish, but I think it is necessary for one to say this. It is not commonly appreciated that there have been a number of episodes in more recent times which approximate the experience of Jonah. I remember, it must be 25 years ago now, a somewhat brash, if I dare say it, young scientist so-called, was pontificating on the BBC in England.

And he made a very dogmatic statement that no one in his right mind would ever dream of believing that a fish could swallow a man and then disgorge him alive three days later. Well, if he did, you may guess what happened. The English are not very belligerent, I look into the faces of some of them here today.

But the correspondence that went on in the listener and in the radio times following upon that was something extraordinary. I don't want to go into the details of that, but what I do want to say is this, that a number of episodes were recorded and valid proofs given relating to events somewhat similar in nature to what we have here. For example, I'll just give you one, and you can find this in certain literature found in Canada and in the States today.

A whaling boat was off the Falkland Islands involved in their fishing escapade when one of the fishermen was missing. This must have been 30 to 35 years ago. No one could understand where the man had got to.

They searched the ship in and out, up and down, but there was no trace of him. And they abandoned him as lost at sea, and they had a service of burial and so forth. Well, they got to land three and a half days later, if I remember correctly.

And they were dissecting two whales which they had brought to land. Right in the belly of the one of them was the very man that was missing. He was a full-grown man.

For two weeks following that, he was a gibbering maniac. But within three weeks, he was back at his normal station in life and lived to a ripe old age. Now, that's only one.

The only other thing I want to say about it is this. Generally speaking, those who are not prone to accept anything supernatural, generally speaking, their main opposition to the possibility of this kind of thing has been due to the alleged fact that the throat of a whale-- and they assumed that the great fish was a whale-- they say that the throat of a whale is incapable of taking in anything that would be in the nature of a human body, that it is too cramped, too small. Now, the fact of the matter is this, that that only applies to the Greenland whale.

And the Greenland whale is found, as the name suggests, in Greenland waters, not in the waters of the Mediterranean. As a matter of fact, in the waters of the Mediterranean, you have an entirely different species of whale called the sperm whale. And it has been put on record scientifically that the sperm whale has been known--let me quote-- has been known to swallow not only a full-grown human being, but has been known to swallow and afterwards eject a mass of about six feet square, which is equal to the bodies of six stout men compressed into one.

So that kind of argument does not hold. Now, I don't want to say more about the fish, not in a direct way, but I need to say that much to banish this kind of undercurrent of disbelief that has never really researched

this matter. And even if there were no other example of this kind, our God is a sovereign God and well able to provide a fish that could do this kind of task if he deemed it necessary.

But apparently, there are other incidents of a somewhat similar order on record. Now, what have we got here in this second chapter? Well, you remember in the first chapter Jonah has disobeyed God. God called him to go to Nineveh to preach.

Jonah took a fish to go in the opposite direction. And what we have then is Jonah, a prophet of God, albeit, but a prophet in rebellion, running away from God. He's caught in a storm.

He has the sense and the grace to say to the sailors in charge of the ship, Look man. He said, I'm afraid I have to tell you that this storm may well have come upon you because of me. Because I've rebelled against my God.

And my God is the Lord of the heavens and the Lord of the sea, the Lord of the land. And this may well be because of me. So for your own sakes, throw me into the water.

Now that brings me to the first point this morning. What the first thing that we learn in this chapter is the futility of the fugitive's plan. The sheer futility of attempting to run away from God.

In order to escape God's will and plan, Jonah took his ship to Tarshish. When the raging storm enveloped the ship so that life seemed precarious for all concerned, Jonah volunteered that it may have been due to him. Why did he, why did he cast himself? Why did he suggest that he should be cast into the sea? Well, I can't tell you whether he thought that he was further away from the eye of God, or from the hand of God, or from the influence of God as he swam in the deep than he was in the hold of the ship.

I don't know. I doubt whether Jonah would have had such notions. But if he did, he was due to be mistaken.

Because there is no way that you and I can get beyond the reach of God. Simply because God is God. You may go to the depths.

God is there. You may climb to the heights. The God and Father of our Lord Jesus is Lord of the heights.

You may go to the east, to the west, to the north, to the south. You may hide here. You may hide thither.

You may go down any side street or up any side alley. But at the end of it is God. And if there is anybody here running away from God this morning, I want to say that with all the dogmatism of which I'm capable.

There are no side alleys. There are no depths. There are no heights.

There are no reaches that can take you out with and beyond the range of the hand and the sovereign power and purpose of God. He meets you there. Francis Thompson's Hound of Heaven was based on this, largely upon this mighty revelation concerning the God of the Bible.

There is no getting away from God. We may think that we can hide from him for a while, but sooner or later he'll show his face. God can turn up anywhere because he is everywhere.

Now in the process of this, in the process of running away, Jonah came to discern, and it must have been a little strange for him. It must have been a little bit of a shock for him. He discerned that the hand of God

was behind what he had up to that point believed was his own suggestion that he should have been cast into the sea.

Now you remember we've already mentioned that it was Jonah himself who suggested to the sailors that he should be cast into the turbulent waters. You have it back in verse 12 of chapter 1. It was Jonah who suggested, throw me into the sea that all may be well with you. You throw me there, but now something's happened.

And you see by the time we come to the third verse of chapter 2, Jonah says this, you hurled me into the deep, into the very heart of the seas, and the currents swirled about me. All your waves and breakers have swept over me. What's he saying? What he's saying is this, that it was purely his own act in the first place, but the strange conviction has now grown over him that somehow or other the hand of God was in it too, so that the billows and the waves that are flowing over him and he's becoming submerged in the depths are not simply the waters into which he dived or was thrown, but God is ruling the waves.

Jonah discovered the sheer futility of trying to outmaneuver the God whom he had disobeyed. God used his very notion to chastise him and to bring him to his senses. The hand of God was in it too.

But let's go a step further. Even behind the exercise of his own self-chosen liberty and rebellion, Jonah sensed, noticed that God had banished him from himself. You hurled me into the deep, he says in verse 3. You hurled me into the deep, into the very heart of the sea, and the currents swirled around me.

Now look what he says in verse 4. I said, I have been banished from your sight. Banished? If he had said I have banished myself from your sight, well you could have understood it because it was Jonah's own idea to be thrown into the waters. But that's not what we have here.

Jonah says somehow or other I feel as if your hand, oh God, was in this too. And somehow or other you brought a curtain between me and yourself. And here I am in the depths.

The worst thing about it is not that I am floundering physically and unable to fend for myself. But I feel as if a curtain, an iron curtain, has been put up between me and you. And I'm banished from your presence.

You see, he was in the elements over which God ruled. And yet he was banished, separated from God himself. But as Jonah swam and then sank in the vast waters of the Mediterranean, the thought now haunts him that it was not altogether his own action.

I have been banished. God is in this thing. By this time, as you will appreciate, Jonah is speaking really as a drowning man.

And part of the horrid experience, part of the traumatic experience of the prophet at this time, was this of course. It was that he was drowning. And that is, that is described in these words.

The engulfing waters threatened me. The deep surrounded me. Seaweed was wrapped around my head.

To the roots of the mountains, or the very bottoms of the mountains, I sank down. The earth beneath barred me from ever. I couldn't get out of the tangled, thick, whatever they were, that kept me there.

I was a prisoner there. You see, Jonah's come to the end of his tether. He might have been a good swimmer.

But sooner or later, he's come to the end of his energy. He's come to the end of his ingenuity. And he cannot cope.

And as Jonah comes to the end of it all, he begins to come to his senses. He discovered at this point the sheer futility of rebelling against the will of his God. It was as if Jonah had decided to run away from God.

And then as if God had opened the door for him to go. And said goodbye to him and closed the door behind him. So that Jonah had gone away.

Oh yes, he chose to go away. But God opened the door. And God provided a ship that was going to Tarshish in the opposite direction.

Rather than a conveyance to Nineveh. It seemed as if God was making it possible for him. And it all comes over him.

In the waters of the deep, with tremendous conviction. Oh my God, I thought I was running away from you. But you've let me into this.

You've allowed me to go. You've given me my way. Your hand is against me.

And you've banished me from your presence. And you see, to a prophet this is the most terrible thing. And this really is a point at which we discern how really spiritual we are.

You see, to a prophet who has communed with God. A prophet who has known what it is to speak to God. And to be addressed by God.

And to carry the word of God out into a world and declare it. To a prophet that has had spiritual intercourse with God in that way. To be bereft of the presence of God is the most terrible thing.

He knew when God was in a sense against him. Or not with him. Or when he was not in fellowship with God.

He knew the difference, you see, between having God and not having him. Between the awareness of God and the unawareness of him. He knew the difference to you.

You see, this is what shows up where we really are spiritually. If God was absent from this service this morning, would you be any the wiser? If we had a lovely choir, as we have. And if you had the best preacher that the world can put in a pulpit.

And God were absent, would you know it? If all the trappings were here, but God was absent. Would you know it? Would you know it? Would I? See, Jonah knew the presence of God. And so he knew when God was absent.

And he knew when God frowned upon him. And he knew when God was saddened by his sin. But he did not recognize it until he got into the depths.

And was floundering and was drowning. And with a seaweed around his head, he said, Oh God, you shut me away from you. The futility of the fugitive's plan.

That leads us to the discovery of the delinquent prophet. Because it is at that point that Jonah began to make the greatest discovery of his life. The discovery that was going to not only simply to turn him around.

But to make him a prophet useful in the hand of God again. There was so much to be discovered by Jonah. That he didn't know as yet.

Even about the God that he had already served. And at this point he begins to discover God in a new way. Now it is necessary for us to see how God did not seem to remonstrate greatly with Jonah when he went away.

I've mentioned this, but I want you to bear it in mind again. God seemed to allow him to go. God didn't fight with him.

Now there may be more to it than meets the eye. Much more may well have taken place between them than is written in scripture. Possibly.

But as far as the book goes. As far as the record goes. God didn't go out of his way to argue with Jonah.

He let him go. Why? Because God knew that this man must get into the depths of the sea. And to the end of his tether.

And to a position of hopelessness in life. Before he comes to his senses. And he can really know God in such a way that he can serve him in the nether.

And so God let him go in order to bring about this teachable spirit. Which can receive a new revelation of himself. In consequence upon which he can be a better prophet and a better servant.

Now there are many things here that we cannot be dogmatic about. One thing is this. And you may find some inconsistencies in what I say this morning.

Due to this fact. Because it may be either or at each point. Jonah prayed this prayer.

In the belly of the big fish. But the events to which he is referring. Had taken place before he got into the belly of the fish.

When he was in the sea. Now the question that is uncertain is this. How many of the events took place outside the belly of the fish.

When Jonah was in the water. And how many of them took place when he was in the belly of the fish. For three days and three nights.

And I can't dogmatize. And if you think I'm being inconsistent. Well now let me prepare you for it.

It'll be because of that. There are certain things that we cannot dogmatize. But let's look at the this man beginning to learn his lesson.

A new lesson or lessons. Now the apparent beginning of Jonah's larger discovery. Starts with what is said in verse 4. He said at the beginning.

I have been banished from your sight. Now we've referred to that. There is a sense of being shut off from God.

There's a door that is closed. And I can't go back. And I can't see his face.

And I can't hear his voice. And I don't think he's interested in me anymore. Banished.

But now look at the next words. Yet says Jonah. Or nevertheless.

I will look again toward your holy temple. Now that's Old Testament language. But what does it mean in New Testament language? Or in our language? It means this.

Lord it seems as if you put a hedge between us. And I can't see you. I can't hear you.

You're out of touch. And as far as I know you've got your back towards me. As I had my back towards you.

But I'm not going to be satisfied with my condition. I'm going to look again towards you. I'm going to turn around.

And you see this is the very precious point here. This is Jonah's repentance beginning to take place. Says Jonah.

I've been running away from you. But I'm going to turn back. And I'm going to look again towards your holy temple.

I'm going to have my eyes in the right direction. And my heart in the right direction. I'm going to turn around.

Now that is a turning point in any man's experience. And it could well be a turning point in the experience of someone here this morning. Having come to that point with his back metaphorically towards God.

Jonah now determined to look again towards the God. Or for the God. Whom he's running away from.

Now that in itself is nothing strange or unrivaled. You meet that kind of thing in many places in the Old Testament and in the New. In fact this is almost an Old Testament equivalent of the parable of the prodigal son in the New.

The prodigal son was brought up in a very well-to-do family. And he fared well. And so did his brother and the whole family and and the servants.

And they had a lot of good things there in the home. They were fairly well to do. But he said to his father give me the share that comes to me from the estate.

I want to go away. And away he went. And you remember the story.

He wasted his substance on riotous living. Indeed it had to come to a worse past than that. He had to come to a point where he had to live on a pig's diet for a number of days.

Until he came to his senses. And you remember one of the first things that happened when he came to his senses. This.

He said. Marie said. Haven't I been so foolish? How many hired servants of my father's.

You know servants not sons. How many hired servants of my father's. They've got plenty of food.

Enough to eat and to spare. And here am I my father's son. I haven't got anything.

But you see the point. He had to get to live on pig's will. And he had to leave his home.

And he had to get away. Into this awful misery of an experience. He wasn't in a whale's belly like Johnna was.

But he certainly was in some similar experience. And he had to get away and become lost apart from God. To recognize the value of the things of his father.

Same kind of thing with Jonah. You only really experience the preciousness of God. When God begins to hide his face.

Now I believe. You may argue with me. Don't find me out afterwards to argue about this.

I'll talk to you another day. But I believe that there are times. When God hides his face for this purpose.

Just for us to see what it's like without him. Just for us to show that we don't want to live without him. And we seek his face.

Oh how often that comes in the old testament. Seek ye my face. Seek ye my face.

I'll tell you what's happened. God has turned away for a little moment. And he wants his people to know what it's like.

When he's got his back to them. Just for a little moment. A little moment.

And then he says. Now you begin to value me. Do you begin to recognize who I am and what I am.

And what it's like to be without me. Then seek my face. Come after me.

Plead with me. Ask of me. And I will grant you the provisions of your heart.

And of your need. The apparent beginning of Jonah's larger discovery was at this point. When he said.

I feel as if I've been shut out from God. But I will not be satisfied with it. I will look again towards your holy temple.

And I say to anybody who may be in Jonah's experience here this morning. Not in the whale. The literal belly of a whale.

But maybe nevertheless in a whale of some more kind. Under some measure of divine displeasure and running away. I tell you.

You will never know the dawn of a better day. And of a fuller knowledge of God. Until you say.

I will turn. And I leave my own self-appointed way. Running away from the God whom I've already confessed.

And I look again towards his holy hill. That's the first stage. In the larger knowledge of the prophet.

The second is this. The evident progress of that further discovery is reflected in verse 7. When my life was ebbing away. I remembered you Lord.

And my prayer rose to you. To your holy temple. Jonah's imperiled life occasioned his remembering God in a new way.

I don't need to say any more about that. But this. Having remembered God.

He says my prayer rose to you. Into your holy temple. Now it seems to me there is more to that than meets the eye.

Jonah not only remembered that he had prayed to God. But he knew that his prayer had arrived. There's a world of difference between the two.

You see there are many prayers that can be said in a sanctuary like this. And they don't go outside the roof. There are many prayers that can be uttered in your home.

In your closet. In your bedroom or anywhere else. And frankly they do not necessarily go any further than the reach of your voice.

You say them. You utter them. But there is no faith in them.

There is no repentance in them. There is no hope in them. There is no expectation in them.

There is nothing of what makes real prayer in them at all. They're just noise. But here in the depths of the Mediterranean.

This man says I, I, I, I, I prayed. And my prayer rose to you. To your holy temple.

My prayer arrived. Jonah you say. I don't know how you can say a thing like that.

Well I'll tell you. Look at verse six and the second half and you have the answer. You brought my life up from the pit.

Oh Lord my God. The prayer was heard and the prayer was answered. That's how he's so sure that it arrived.

This was not just talking. Praying language. This was praying.

Urgently praying. And the prayer that was uttered. Arrived.

And having arrived. It was heard by the God to whom it was addressed. And the God who heard it.

Answered and gave Jonah exactly what he asked for. An interesting point here. What was the answer to this? You brought my life up from the pit.

The word is Sheol. Translated hell in some of the versions wrongly. But Sheol.

The place of the dead. What is Jonah referring to? Well now there are many alternatives. Can I tell you what I think it refers to? And if any of you want to talk about it further.

I'd be very happy to speak to you. I think that at this point. Jonah was floundering as a drowning man in the bottom of the ocean.

In the bottom of the Mediterranean. He was going through the experience that we read of earlier. With a seaweed around his neck.

And these tangled undergrowths there. He didn't know the way out. He got to the bottom.

But he can't find his way out. He can't extricate himself again. And he's about to gasp his last breath.

When suddenly there comes this gigantic fish. Now is the fish a messenger of mercy or of judgment? Has the fish come to destroy him or to save him? Well you know the answer don't you? As far as Jonah could see. The fish had come to destroy him.

And I've no doubt. As he looked into the open mouth of that gigantic creature. He thought the end had come.

And God had not heard his prayers. But as a matter of fact. That fish was commissioned by the almighty God to take care of Jonah.

To get him out from the bottom of the ocean. To bring him up to the high seas. Up to the surface and ultimately to eject him.

So that he could begin his work as a prophet again. God heard his prayer. How did God hear his prayer? By preparing this particular fish.

Sending it to that particular place. And at that moment. Taking Jonah in as a passenger.

As one of the old church fathers says very beautifully. I can't quote him verbatim. Says very beautifully.

Just as a little fetus in the mother's womb is nursed. Until the moment of its delivery. God made this gigantic creature.

Care for Jonah in its stomach. Until the moment of his ejection was appointed. But the magnificent climax of Jonah's enlarged discovery.

Is given in verses eight and nine. Now Jonah's become a preacher. You see you can't keep a prophet under too long.

He becomes a preacher as well as a man of prayer. And so you find echoes of a sermon here. Or three sermons perhaps.

Or a three-pointed sermon. Those who cling to worthless idols. Forfeit to the grace that could be theirs.

But I with a song of thanksgiving. Will sacrifice to you. While I have vowed I will make good.

Salvation comes from the Lord. Here's the climax. Jonah's learned some lessons.

What are they? Well first a principle he claimed to have learned. Those who cling to worthless idols. Forfeit the grace that could be theirs.

You say that Jonah's school was a very hard school. To be in the whale or in the fish's belly. I say to you it was indeed.

But you know the lessons that he learned there were very precious. And they're lessons that you don't always learn in a university setup. Jonah learned this major lesson.

At this point when the whale has taken him in as a passenger. I'm sorry the fish has taken him in as a passenger. Whether it was a whale or not I can't tell.

What is the lesson? This. Those who cling to worthless idols. Forfeit the grace that could be theirs.

What is the lesson? This. There is no grace away from God. There is no grace in idolatry.

There is no grace in any other religion. But you say why should we make such fuss about grace? Oh my good friend I hope I don't need to answer that. But I must nevertheless.

What is grace? Grace is God dealing with a most undeserving person. According to the deserts of the most worthy. God dealing with hell deserving sinners.

According to the deserts and the merits of his heavenly seated son. This is grace. This is God looking at a worm was rebelled against him.

And not dealing with that man according to what he deserves. But looking then at the face of his anointed Jesus Christ. And dealing with a rebel as Jesus deserves.

And for Jesus sake forgiving his sin. For Jesus sake taking him back again. For Jesus sake making him a friend and a prophet again.

That's grace. And I tell you there is no grace away from God. Bring up your religions.

Bring out your philosophies. Come and talk about them. I tell you there's no grace in them.

There is no knowledge of a God who pardons iniquity. Who comes to the utterly unworthy and says I'll make your life again. And I'll charge you nothing for it.

It is all gratis. I've paid the price. My son has died.

He's risen again. I've sent my spirit. I've done everything.

It's free for you. That's grace. Oh my good friend get hold of this this morning.

Those who cling to worthless idols forfeit the grace that might be theirs. Surely this is very relevant as we come up to missionary conference. As indeed it is at all times.

Why should we go and preach to those who have another religion? I tell you there is no other religion known among men where grace flows toward the hell deserving and the lost. But our God is a God of grace. Who is a pardoning God like thee? Or who has grace so rich and free? That's the message.

Now you may have to go into the belly of a fish before you learn that lesson. Many of us are too comfortable to recognize this. And it is only when we've got into real difficulty that we shall discover that God is gracious even to us.

In Christ. A principle he claimed to have learned. A vow he made.

You can't learn a lesson like that without doing something about it. And Jonah was very consistent. But I, he says, with a song of thanksgiving will sacrifice to you.

Poor Jonah. What sacrifices he got to give in the belly of the whale. None at all.

Or if he was saying this in the water. He can't do it then of course. But he did it in intention.

Oh my God, he says. I'll have to do something about this. There'll have to be a thanksgiving service for this.

And I will sacrifice to you, he says. And what I have vowed I will make good. There in the whale's belly the penitent prophet vowed that his sacrifices would follow his prayer.

And I have no doubt that when ultimately he did come back to land and he had the opportunity. He must have done so. But notice this.

I've left out words here. I haven't stressed them. Thanksgiving and sacrifice with a song.

I with a song of thanksgiving will sacrifice to you. Jonah says in other words at the point when he uttered this prayer first of all. He says my God I will make my sacrifice.

And I will give and bring my thanksgiving with a song. In other words it'll not be grudging. And it will not be just as part of some formal service somewhere organized by somebody else.

But I will bring it with my song. My heart will be in it. It will not be tepid.

It will not be cold. I'll sing to you. You know anything of that? You know God in this way that you can make a sacrifice with a song.

When he asks you to give something for the support of his missionaries. For the support of his church. And some of you good people sacrifice.

I know that. And I don't want you to interpret this as being meant in any wrong spirit. But listen brothers and sisters.

How many of us can sacrifice with a song? The supreme reason for his joyous expectation for his sorrow on account of the misery of idolatry. Is this salvation he says in a positive statement comes from the Lord. Now notice Jonah's in the belly of the fish now.

But listen what he says. Salvation comes from the Lord. What do you mean Jonah? Well nothing short than this of course.

Short from this. He meant that even though he was encased in the belly of the fish. He knew that he was saved.

He had been saved from the depths of the Mediterranean. And he knew that God had come thus far to rescue him. And he believed that the God who sent the fish would bring him to his destination.

He believed that. Salvation is of the Lord. And he believes that God has come to save him.

Okay what God begins he finishes. That's Jonah's philosophy. But now notice.

How does Jonah express such a faith at such a time? Why didn't he believe this some time ago? I'll tell you. Have no doubt about this. I said to you some things you can't dogmatize about.

But I can dogmatize about this. There is one thing that cripples faith in all of us. Not our geographical location.

Doesn't matter where you are. If you've got faith you can that faith can be active. Not the people that you're with.

You know there is one thing that cripples faith. And makes it wilt like a faded flower. And become inactive like a lifeless limb.

You know what that is? Sin. Rebellion. And the moment Jonah ran away and sulked and said.

I will not go to the place where you want me to go. The moment Jonah ran away. Faith began to wither and wilt.

And we don't hear of it very much until now. And he's looking again towards the temple of God. And he's determined to pay his vow.

And to bring his sacrifice. And to sing his song. Because salvation is of the Lord.

God is a saving God. He's the Lord of the seas. The Lord of the land.

Is the Lord of all. And this big fish Jonah doesn't understand it as yet. It seems as if he's in prison forever.

No no says Jonah. Salvation is of the Lord. I'm on my way through to safety.

Faith comes to her own only when sin is done away with. You know why so many of us don't have more faith? Because we have so much sin. Unconfessed.

Undealt with. And the message, one message of the book of Jonah is this. Let's confess our sin.

There is nothing more urgent. If we are seeking to have a company. A fellowship of men and women.

Who exercise faith. Let's forget and let's see our sins acknowledged. That God may forgive them and forget them.

I'm through. What is the application of all this? First of all rebellion against God can only lead to trouble. Because God is God.

We cannot outwit him. We cannot outrun him. God is God.

That being so there are some sorrows. Not all sorrows. Not all difficulties in our lives.

But there are some. Which we have brought upon ourselves. And which God has allowed to come our way.

In order to bring us to the end of our tether. So that at the end of our tether. We should learn the beginning of the reality of his grace.

Now on this Thanksgiving morning. I come to the end by asking this. Whether having brought our gifts of silver and gold.

Our dollars. And handed them over to the Lord this morning. Whether we cannot each of us likewise bring ourselves anew.

And if in any wise we are conscious that we have wandered astray. Or try to run away from the God of our fathers. From the only true and living God.

Let's come back to him and say. I will look again towards your holy temple. And I will pay my sacrifice.

I will make my vow and keep it. And I will do it with a song. And you will find that whatever monster of a fish you may have been in.

One day it will discard you. On to the land of a new beginning. That will be our story next week.

But it's the beginning of the story today. When all this had happened. God said to this mighty monster.

Get rid of your passenger. For Jonah had learned his lesson. And now we can move ahead.

Now God can send him to Nineveh. Now Nineveh will hear and listen to him. May the spirit of God enable us then.

In our thanksgiving to offer our hearts afresh. As well as our gifts. That we may be useful to his purpose.

And servants of his will. Wherever in his wisdom he would place us. Let us pray.

Oh almighty God our father. We thank you for this strange episode. The externals of this story are certainly not the kind of thing that we talk about every day.

Or meet every day. There is the extraordinary about it. And yet beneath the extraordinary exterior.

There are so many features that are common to us. And common to your people. For there is much of Jonah in all of us.

And we go our own way. And we get into trouble. And we think you have banished us.

And we are afraid and alone in the deep. And we can almost feel ourselves sinking. And no one can help us.

And we get caught and entangled in sins. And then you send a strange monster. Something we would not welcome.

To lift us up again. Oh God. Help us to turn to you again.

With a whole heart. And with a willingness and a dedication that is as total as it can be made by grace. For your glory.

And for the good of distant Nineveh. Not the Nineveh of Jonah's day. But our Nineveh.

Eastern Europe. Distant China. The islands of the South Seas.

And Greenland in the North. Oh God. For the sake of the distant places of the earth.

Take us anew into your hands. And forgive our sins. Through Jesus Christ.

Your Son. Amen.

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