

25.2.24

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Date: 25 February 2024

Preacher: Reverend Gordon Matheson

[0 : 0 0] Good morning. It's good to see so many here this morning. I would like to welcome Reverend Gordon Matheson to our pulpit this morning. I'm very grateful for Gordon coming and preaching to us. You've seen the intimations scrolling on the screen this morning. There's tea and coffee after the service and please if you're visiting and have the opportunity and the time please stay back and have some fellowship. There'll be no evening service tonight. We're closing the service this evening so people can attend the South Harris Communion and the service this evening in Liverpool is at 6pm in Liverpool. Community lunch tomorrow here in the church and again takeaways will be available for anyone that's not able to come along. Ladies fellowship during the week, Little Fish's Road to Recovery on Tuesday night and the prayer meeting will be led by Aman on Tuesday night and will be on Zoom as well.

Friday clubs, Jam Connect and Rooted at the usual times and there will be a congregational meal on Saturday the 2nd of March at 6pm and you'll see their team one are on duty and if anyone can help towards the food please put your name on the food donation sheet out in the hall and next Sunday services God willing will be taken by our own minister and church cleaning rota as we have it there. And communion weekend the 8th to the 10th of February and please pray.

8th to the 10th of March, that should read, sorry. I was just reading what was on the screen. So on Friday the 8th of March the Gaelic service will be taken by Reverend Ronnie Morrison, retired and the services on Saturday the 9th of March and Sunday the 10th of March will be taken by Reverend Kenny I. MacLeod who's no stranger to us. I think that's all the interventions and we're going to hand over to Gordon and we pray that God will bless the message that he has for us this morning.

Thank you. Well good morning. It's lovely to be with you. This is my first time here actually in this building so it's nice to see the congregation in such good health as well. We're going to worship God but just before we sing to his praise in Psalm 116 I'm going to read a few verses from the book of Jonah.

In fact it's really just the last verse of this chapter. But I with voice of thanksgiving will sacrifice to you what I have vowed I will pay. Salvation belongs to the Lord. It's in that firm hope that today we come to worship and so let's do so singing to God's praise in Psalm 116. I don't have a copy of the words are they on the screen? Yeah I can see that.

[3 : 1 0] So yeah I love the Lord because my voice and prayers heeded here while I live will call on him who bowed to me his ear. We'll stand and sing to God's praise. I love the Lord because my voice Son prayer she did here. I while I live will call on him who bowed to me his ear.

Of death the courts and sorrows did A birth become a strong The pains of hell Too cold on me I grieved and troubled Upon the name of God the Lord God bless him And yet I call and save Delivered of my soul

O Lord I do Thee humbly pray God, merciful and righteous is, yea, gracious is our Lord.

God saves the me, I was brought low, He did me help afford.

O thou, my soul, do thou return unto thy quiet rest.

- [6 : 07] For large below the Lord to me, His bounty hath expressed.
For my distressed soul from death, delivered was by thee.
The gifts my mourning eyes from tears, my feet from falling free.
Let's pray to God together. Our Heavenly Father, we come before you today with that great sense of joy and thankfulness that we can indeed say salvation belongs to the Lord.
Thank you that you're the one who steady us in times of disaster. No calamity greater than the consequence of our own sin and rebellion against you.
- [7 : 36] You have turned us from a path of destruction to a path of life. And so we today rejoice in that great salvation that is found in Christ alone.
We seek, O Lord, today to give you thanks, therefore, for all the blessings that flow to us, both in this life and in the hope that we have beyond the moment of our death and looking ahead ultimately to the great day of the resurrection.
We thank you that today we can say Jesus has risen, that he is seated on the throne of heaven, that he is indeed Lord over all. And so therefore, Lord, we seek to come to you today with thankfulness for all of the blessings that he pours out upon us and in our lives.
We thank you for the blessings of family, of friendship, of fellowship within the life of the church. We thank you, Father, for the blessings that we enjoy in temporal things. We have homes, we have employment, we have opportunities to serve you and to use the gifts that you have given us.
We pray, Father, for those who are struggling, though, in these ways, perhaps experiencing just now times of great distress because things in their lives are not going as they would have hoped or wanted.
- [8 : 50] And we pray for those who are sick. We pray for those who are going through times of anguish, perhaps bereaved and experiencing a sense of loss.
We ask and pray, Father, that in all of the different experiences of life that you would remain to us a light and a comfort, a guide and a direction that will show us the way in which we should go.
We want, Lord, today to give you thanks for the blessing of the church. We thank you that the church today is united. It is one body of Christ spread throughout the whole world.
And as we gather in worship today, we want to know, Father, and experience that unity with the body of Christ. And so we lift up before you today our brothers and sisters in other parts of the world as they gather.
We thank you that we are in solidarity with them, especially those who are experiencing great persecution for righteousness' sake just now. We remember our brothers and sisters who are imprisoned in parts of the world.
- [9 : 51] We know, Father, there are many places where your people are hated and despised. We know there are many places where people do not gather freely as we do today. And so we ask, Father, that your blessing would be upon the church in these dire times as well.
We pray, Father, for places where the church is experiencing rapid growth. We pray, Father, that the growth of the church in these places would be one that is matched with depth. And so we therefore pray today, Father, for seminaries where ministers are being trained for the preaching of the word, where people's lives are being prepared for your service.
And we ask and pray, Father, for your rich blessing upon these places. We thank, Lord, today particularly of the seminary in Nepal that we associate with as a denomination. We pray for Siraj and his colleagues in that seminary.

And we ask and pray, Father, that you would bless and prosper the work of the gospel in that land. We thank today, Father, of the opportunities that there are to bring the gospel into such places.

And we ask and pray, Father, that you would embolden the church, that you would give them wisdom and clarity for how they reach their culture and their community with the good news.

[11 : 03] And so, Father, may we be filled with the same spirit, given wisdom and boldness for how we proclaim Christ in the days in which we live as well. We know there is no greater display of Christian apologists.

There is no greater reason for the church than the love that we have for one another. And so we pray, Father, that you would stir up love more and more within your people, and that your saints would be known for the love that they have for one another, and that your blessing would therefore flow upon us, and that we would see many coming to know Christ Jesus as their Lord and Savior.

We pray today, Father, for your blessing on our presbytery, and we pray for the vacancies around our presbytery just now. We ask and pray that you would raise up ministers to fill these places. We remember our own training seminary down in Edinburgh, and we ask and pray for your blessing on those who are studying there, as well as the staff.

We pray for your blessing in all of that work of preparation. And we pray, Father, that you would raise up others as well, that the need across Scotland is great. And we pray for our church plants, and we pray for the expansion of the church across this land, that you would continue to bless those who are going out with the gospel.

And may it be, Lord, brought to the fullness of your glorious praise, as we see many brought to know Christ in these days. We remember our islands, Lord, as well.

[12 : 26] We pray for these communities. You know, Father, the challenges that are before us in our communities are great. We know, Lord, there are great problems with work and employment. There's so much uncertainty around these things.

We ask and pray, Father, for your blessing on these islands, then. We pray for those who are striving in positions of leadership, for our councillors, for our members of parliament, that you would help them and bless them in the work and the roles that they have.

We pray, Father, for our schools. And we know, Lord, there is this constant awareness, Lord, even this week, Lord. It's been across the news almost every day.

The terrible state of education across our country since the COVID pandemic. And we know, Lord, from very detailed studies, parts of other parts of the country, but we know it's reflected often in our own schools here in the islands as well, that so often there is violence, there's bullying, there's many, many problems in our education system.

And so we do pray, Father, that you would bless us and help us to recover something of the Christian ethos that informed the Scottish education system. And we pray, Father, for wisdom for how we do that.

[13 : 36] And Lord, we pray that above all things, we would see a desire to see men and women, boys and girls, educated so that they can understand you and your word, so that we can understand what you have to say.

And we ask and pray, Father, that you would give wisdom, therefore, to us in how we think about education in our communities as well. So, Father, be with us today in our time of worship together.

Father, may we know your presence, may we know the Holy Spirit working with us and in us, helping us to understand and apply your word into our lives, and to be renewed and transformed in the working of the Holy Spirit, bringing life to us.

In these things we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. So, I'm seeing there are some kids kicking around.

I was told, some of you might not be here today, I almost wasn't here today myself, because earlier this week, I got, I wonder if any of you ever had a bug. If any of you ever had a bug?

[14 : 39] You know what a bug is? If you had a bug, what would be happening to you? Well, it's not like there wouldn't be lots of creepy crawlies going all over you, would there?

No. You'd have what we call the bulk. And that's what I had a few days ago this week, and I was feeling really miserable with it.

And sometimes you feel like that, you think, oh man, you're really looking forward to something. This week we were really looking forward to having pizza, because it was my wee boy's birthday on Friday, and we thought we're going to have pizza on Friday night.

And all the cousins were going to come round, and everyone was going to enjoy pizza. If you ever had pizza from the, I'm talking about pizza a lot tomorrow, but if you ever had pizza from the Crown Inn in Stornoway, it's really good.

Extra cheese. It's brilliant. And unfortunately, on Friday night, we weren't able to have all the cousins round. Callum, by that point, he had fully recovered from the bug, so he went round to his granny's, and he had pizza with his cousins.

[15 : 47] But me, and Callum's mum, Delina, and Callum's sister, Hannah, we're stuck at home, full of, not pizza, but something else.

And it wasn't very pleasant. And you sometimes wonder that. You think, why is it that when you're really looking forward to something, when you really want something good to happen, and you're thinking, this is going to be so much fun, we're going to have pizza, and then we're going to have, call on the caterpillar cake, and it's going to have a sparkler thing on it, and it'll be great fun.

Why is it you think, oh, it hasn't happened, it hasn't come together, it hasn't worked out the way we really wanted it to? You ever feel like that? Something you're really looking forward to?

And it just doesn't happen. You know, the Bible tells us there's an explanation for that. It's a very simple explanation in the Bible. And it is simply this, that because Adam sinned, and because we as the whole human race are sinners, because sin has come into the world, everything has been corrupted.

And everything at times is going to feel like it's absolutely rubbish. Because the things that we really want, the best things that we really want, can be easily corrupted, easily broken, easily experience that shattering of things not working out the way we really want.

[17 : 23] And I was talking to my wife about this the other day. I was saying, it's such a shame, isn't it? And she was saying to me, you know, Gordon, I think it's important that we just remember that there's a lot of good things we can give thanks for.

I was like, yeah, yeah. And then she said, there's also an awful lot of bad things in the world. And I was like, yep. And then she says to me, it's very wise. My wife is a very wise person, she says to me. Gordon, that's why we have to remember, isn't it?

And we need to teach the kids this. And that's why we need grace. That's why we need to continue to rely on a gracious, loving God who has promised to give us all good things.

His purposes for us are good. And along the way in this world, we're going to experience that effect of sin. We're going to experience the brokenness of the world. But in Jesus, one day, all things are going to be made perfect.

If we're looking, in fact, in this world right now, if we're looking to things being good, we're missing the point. The best will be when Christ returns, when this world is made perfect, and when Jesus comes to be with us.

[18 : 36] And so if you experience disappointments along the way, just remember that hunger for something better, that's something maybe God's given you, to look for the best things that can be found in Jesus Christ.

We're going to sing again to God's praise, this time from a hymn. I don't, again, I'm missing the words. I'm so used to having the words in front of me. A bit of a wee book. But yeah, so the words are up on the screen.

What gift of grace is Jesus, my Redeemer? Again, we'll stand to sing to God's praise. Let's sing to God's praise.

My righteousness and freedom, My steadfast love, My deep and boundless peace. To this I owe, My hope is only Jesus, For my life is holy love to His.

Oh, how strange and divine I can say, all is mine, yet not I, but to Christ in me.

[20 : 09] The night is dark, but I am not forsaken, for by my side the Savior he will stay.

I labor on in weakness and rejoicing, for in my need his power is dismayed.

To this I hold, my shepherd will defend me, through the deepest valley he will be.

Oh, the night has been won, and I shall overcome, yet knows I, but to Christ in me.

No fate I dread, I know I am forgiven, the future sure, the price it has been paid.

[21 : 13] For Jesus bled and suffered for my pardon, and he was raised to overthrow the grave.

To this I hold, my sin has been defeated, Jesus now and ever is my being.

All their chains are released like a sin, I am free, yet not I, but to Christ in me.

With every breath I long to follow Jesus, for he has said that he will bring me home.

And day by day I know he will renew me, until I stand with joy before the throne.

[22 : 17] To this I hold, my hope is only Jesus, all the glory evermore to him.

When the race is complete, still my life shall repeat. Yet not I, but through Christ in me.

When the race is complete, still my life shall repeat. Yet not I, but through Christ in me.

When the race is complete, still my life shall repeat. When the race is complete, still my life shall repeat. When the race is complete, still my life shall repeat. Well, shall we turn and read just now in God's word in the book of Jonah.

And this is in the Old Testament, the book of Jonah, chapter 2. I have to apologize, I hadn't initially been planning on preaching on this today.

[23 : 30] I've been, since I've moved back to the island, I've been preaching once a month in the congregation in tongue. And I'm working through Jonah with them. I was there a couple of weeks ago, and this week, because I'd been unwell, I just didn't really have time to prepare anything afresh for this morning.

So I apologize if I'm jumping into the middle of the story, as it were, in the book of Jonah. But I'm sure most of us here today are familiar with this. Jonah was called by God to go to the city of Nineveh and call out against it, for their sin had come up against him.

And Jonah, instead of going to Nineveh, decides to head the opposite direction. He goes down to Tarshish. Adopah, rather, he finds a boat that's heading to Tarshish, across the Mediterranean. And a great storm is hurled against the boat.

And in the course of events, basically, it's revealed that Jonah is fleeing from the Lord, and the sailors in the boat have agreed to throw him overboard. And you read at the end of chapter one that the Lord, after Jonah has been thrown overboard, the Lord appointed a great fish to swallow up Jonah.

And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights. Now, this is where he's in the belly of the fish. Then Jonah prayed to the Lord, his God, from the belly of the fish, saying, I called out to the Lord out of my distress, and he answered me.

[24 : 53] And out of the belly of Sheol I cried, and you heard my voice. For you cast me into the deep and into the heart of the seas, and the floods surrounded me.

All your waves and your billows passed over me. Then I said, I am driven away from your sight. Yet I shall again look upon your holy temple.

The waters closed in over me to take my life. The deep surrounded me. Weeds were wrapped about my head. The roots of the mountains.

I went down to the land whose bars closed upon me forever. Yet you brought up my life from the pit, O Lord my God.

When my life was fainting away, I remembered the Lord, and my prayer came to you in your holy temple. Those who pay regard to vain idols forsake their hope of steadfast love.

[25 : 57] But I, with voice of thanksgiving, will sacrifice to you what I have vowed I will pay. Salvation belongs to the Lord.

And the Lord spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah up upon the dry land. Amen. This is God's word to us.

We're going to sing again to God's grace this time in Gaelic. Part of my thinking this morning with this passage that we're looking at is the link actually directly into the New Testament.

Jesus, and I think it's in Matthew's Gospel, if I can get the right text, Matthew 12 it is, talks about a sign being given. And the sign that's been given, he says, will be like the sign of Jonah, but a greater than Jonah is here.

And the sign of Jonah is the fact that he was as good as dead, thrown into the sea, in the belly of the fish for three days. But then on the third day, he was spewed out onto dry land, returned to the land of the living, as it were.

[27 : 03] And that's obviously Jesus talking about his resurrection, and the great sign of the resurrection following his death. And that's where our hope is to be found. As I was preparing on this and thinking about it, I was thinking that some of the themes actually that came out of this were very similar to those that we would think about at communion.

When we think about the cross in particular, and the work of Jesus. And so I thought we would sing just now from Psalm 118. Traditionally, it's words that would be sung as we would go to the Lord's table.

So we're going to sing from verse 22. I'll read them in English. And then verse 24, sorry. Yeah, verse 24. It's that idea that the blessing that comes to the Lord's people is one that comes through Christ.

He is the one who comes in the Lord's name and the temple is Jesus himself. And so it's from the place of Christ that blessing flows. So we'll sing these verses in Gaelic to God's praise.

[illegible]

[29 : 10] Oh, my God.

Oh, my God.

Oh, my God.

Oh, my God.

Oh, my God. Oh, my God. Oh, my God. Oh, my God. Oh, my God.

[31 : 22] Well, would you turn in your Bibles, please, back to Jonah chapter 2. And we'll just pray before we study the word together.

Heavenly Father, as we come before you this morning, we thank you for the great mystery of the resurrection. We wouldn't understand, Lord, what has happened there.

We wouldn't understand, Lord, what has happened there, why the tomb is empty, were it not for the words of Jesus himself foretelling this would be the case. And we thank you, Father, for what that means for us.

That the work of Jesus truly has been finished, that he is victorious over sin and now death and that he will one day return.

And so we pray, Father, that we pray, Father, that we pray, that we will receive and hear the good news with gladness and be transformed in our minds.

[32 : 28] We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. Jonah 2 is an interesting chapter because you'd kind of think it would make more sense if Jonah uttered these words after verse 10.

So the end of the chapter, the Lord speaks to the fish. It vomits Jonah out onto the dry land. And you'd think that's the point where Jonah throws his hands up in the air and says, thank you, Lord. I've been saved.

But actually, that's not the case. And that's one of the key things, in fact, to understand what's going on in Jonah 2. These are words that are issued from the belly of the fish.

So Jonah is in the belly of the fish. It's a horrific experience. And yet, he has this prayer which is full of thanksgiving to God.

And that's a hard thing for us to kind of grasp and understand. How is it in the midst of really awful experiences? I don't know if any of you have ever been swallowed by a fish like Jonah was.

[33 : 43] I don't know. But I can imagine it's a pretty horrific experience. But in the middle of really horrific experiences, we can be filled with thankfulness. And I think for us today, the points that I want to think about are simply this.

That Jonah is, first of all, thankful that he's been saved from sin. And the context here is amazingly significant. The reason Jonah is in the belly of the fish is because he has been saved from his sin.

He's then also saved from death because the consequences of his sin were literally deadly. He was thrown overboard. And he was going to die.

And the fish, for all the horror of the rescue, is actually a means of salvation. He survives. He finds himself not drowning and dead, but inside a fish.

And he's full of thankfulness that he's not dead. Because salvation belongs to the Lord. And it's important as well, as we think about this, to see the connection to Jesus.

[34 : 52] Because in that passage in Matthew, when the scribes and the Pharisees come to Jesus and they demand a sign from him, he says no sign is going to be given except the sign of Jonah. And that is his own resurrection as proof that salvation belongs to the Lord.

And that the death of Jesus, which his resurrection kind of proves to us, his death is a victory over sin.

It is a victory over the consequences of sin. And his resurrection is that ultimate proof to us that salvation belongs to the Lord.

The reason I say that is because Paul makes that point. He says if Jesus is not raised and if the resurrection is something that has already happened, or if there's somehow something false about the resurrection, we are of all people most miserable.

If all we are looking for is hope in this world, if all we are looking for is hope in this life, and there is no ultimate hope to be found in the resurrection of Jesus, which will ultimately flow to the resurrection of us when Christ comes, then there is no hope for us.

[36 : 08] And we are miserable people. We have believed a lie. And so today that's the three things I want us to think about, is that this is a victory for thanksgiving over sin.

It is a song of thanksgiving for victory over death, because salvation ultimately belongs to the Lord. First of all, in that idea that this is a rescue from sin, we need to see it in verses 2 to 4.

I called out to the Lord out of my distress, and he answered me out of the belly of Sheol. I cried, and you heard my voice. You cast me into the deep and into the heart of the seas, and the flood surrounded me, and all of your waves and your billows passed over me.

Then I said, I am driven away from your sight. Yet I shall look back upon your holy temple. Or I shall look again upon your holy temple.

The reason that Jonah's in this situation is because God had called him. And instead of obeying the call of God, Jonah had gone the opposite direction.

[37 : 14] Nineveh, geographically, the route to Nineveh from Israel would have been to travel north, to carry on around the Fertile Crescent, and to arrive in the great city of Nineveh. Jonah's strategy was to head south from where he lived in a place called Gath-Hefer, towards the town of Joppa, it was a port, and there take a Phoenician trading vessel that was heading across the Mediterranean, probably to somewhere in Spain called Tarshish.

So you can't imagine being more disobedient. God says, do this, and Jonah says, nah, I'm going this way.

And that sense of Jonah's disobedience permeates into everything that then follows.

Because when the storm erupts against the boat, the sailors know that this is something supernatural. It is something powerful. They know, they believe, that one of the gods is trying to speak to them, get their attention.

And when they finally cast lots to see who is the sinner, who the gods are trying to get to, the lot falls on Jonah. And Jonah confesses his sin then, confesses his guilt.

[38 : 26] I am fleeing from the presence of the Lord. I am fleeing from the Lord's command, the Lord's instruction. And so Jonah's situation is one where his sin is what has brought him to this point. The sense that he is in the belly of Sheol, that he has been driven away from the presence of the Lord.

All of this indicates to us Jonah's sense of sorrow, now confession, over his own wrongdoing.

And yet, there is a but in the second half of verse 4. For all, Jonah has sinned. And for all, he's actually not just fled from the command of God, but you see it in chapter 1.

He flees from the presence of the Lord. For all, he's fled from fellowship with God, because that's what our sin does. It interrupts our fellowship with God. It's not just that we don't do what God says and things continue okay with us and God.

When we allow ourselves to inhabit sin and sinful ways, what happens is our fellowship with God is disrupted. Our friendship with him experiences disruption.

[39 : 34] Because he's fled from the presence of the Lord, he says, yet I will again look upon your holy temple.

And for Jonah, as an Israelite, the greatest joy would have been going to the temple in Jerusalem. It would have been attending, perhaps, the Day of Atonement.

Times of sacrifice, where he would go and offer sacrifices for his sins. To know that the presence of the Lord was really there to meet with him and to cleanse him of his iniquity.

And he says, I know this will still happen. Although I have neglected my friendship with you. Although I have neglected my fellowship with you.

Although I have neglected walking with you the way I should. I know that a day is coming when all will be restored. And the presence of the great fish swallowing him is an instantaneous reason for him to give thanks.

[40 : 39] Because he knows, in the horror of it, that God's redemption, God's salvation from sin is real. I don't know how much Jonah understood of this.

I think he understood probably enough to say that sin is ghastly. And it needs a dire solution. The reason I say that is because that's literally what our sin is.

Our sin is horrific. We downplay it. All the time. But it's important for us to remember what our sin needs in order to experience our redemption.

Our sin needs the cross. These little moments where we say to ourselves, we trick ourselves. We listen to the lie of Satan.

And in an instant, like snapping our fingers, we say to ourselves, it's okay for me to rebel against God in this moment. It's okay for me to resist God's command. It's okay for me to...

[41 : 44] What follows that? To gossip? Maybe. It's a small thing. Maybe more serious things.

It's okay for me to look lustfully on someone. It's okay for me to wander away from fellowship with God to fellowship with the world.

It's okay for me to pursue money and fame and wealth and riches rather than pursue faithfully God's call. When we allow ourselves to do these things, the consequence, the only way of restoring fellowship is the cross of Jesus.

That's how ugly our sin is. Because it demands an ugly salvation. Something horrible has to happen.

God the Son has to die in our place. And so he goes, bloodied, battered, hung naked on a cross, put to public shame and derision for our sin.

[43 : 07] And Jonah, as he cries out from the belly of the fish, realizes this is his salvation. His sin has led to this point and it leads to an ugly thing that needs to happen and being swallowed by a fish is an ugly thing.

We shouldn't for a second, by the way, imagine that this isn't history. I mean, Jesus... Remember, Jesus said, no sign will be given except the sign of Jonah.

So if the resurrection of Jesus is to be taken as anything literal, so too must the sign of Jonah. It has to be something literal for Jesus to have made sense of this. And Jesus then goes on, in fact, to say the men of Nunavut will be raised up in judgment against the generation that he lives in.

To condemn them because they repented whilst his own generation didn't. This happened. And it's a horrific experience.

But it's a horrific experience that says to Jonah, my sin, although it is real, can be dealt with. And I am thankful to God for that.

[44 : 16] Because through this horrific experience, I will again have fellowship with God. And I will again come to the holy temple of God and meet with him there.

Today, we have to ask ourselves, what are we engaged in to deal with our sin? I mean, do we think it's a small thing?

Sometimes people think this. They think sin is one of these things that you really just need a bit of self-help to get over. You know, there's like a 12-step guide. Maybe six steps.

In fact, the fewer steps, the better. Just enough to solve our consciences to say we've done just enough. But ultimately, there is only one step that matters.

It's the step of coming to the cross. Coming to that, in fact, ugly place. And confessing our need there.

[45 : 21] Confessing our sin there. And saying, Lord, take my guilt. Take my shame. And carry it on your tree. This is why we need to come to Jesus.

As our only hope. Because he is the one who rescues us from sin. But there is more to it than that as well. It's not simply the fact that Jonah at this moment can say, Well, I will one day again see God in his holy temple.

Because when I die, I will go to be with him. It's not that alone. There's more to it. Because Jonah acknowledges that there is actually a redemption here from death.

He is rescued from death. If you look very closely at verses 5 and 6. The waters closed in over me, taking my life. The deep surrounded me. The weeds wrapped about my head. And the roots of the mountains I went down into the land.

Whose bars closed in over me forever. But there's another but. Yet, you brought up my life from the pit. Oh, Lord, my God. You have brought my life up from the pit.

[46 : 31] The picture that he's describing there is one of drowning. There's that sense of being closed in.

Disappearing into the depths of his breath escaping. And as the waters engulf him, as the weeds entangle him, as the depths of the sea imprisons him.

The ancient world, it's a strange thing to kind of reflect on. But in the ancient world, the sea was seen as a place of chaos and destruction and devastation. If you went down into the sea, you were never coming back.

And in fact, in the ancient world, mariners were seen as a sort of, they were seen as an odd sort. They're kind of crazy. And they had to be, because it was a devastating world to inhabit.

You know, there's no GPS navigation. There's no mobile phone communication back to home. There's no radar. All you've got is your wits and celestial navigation.

[47 : 43] And if you sank, you were never seen for again. You were gone. That's interestingly why, in fact, in the Bible, it can talk about our sins being cast into the sea of God's forgetfulness.

Once something's in the sea, it's gone. We still sometimes think like that a wee bit. The sea swallows things whole. They disappear forever. And that's the way Jonah felt he was going to be.

He was going to end up dead, gone forever, swallowed up by the waters of the sea. And yet, there is a moment of redemption that comes to him. There is an experience of salvation.

Whilst he looks death in the eye, God appoints the fish to swallow him up. And that's really the pinnacle of the sign of Jesus that he promised these faithless doubters in his own day.

His death looked, to all intents and purposes, final. It looked like a victory for the devil. We finally got rid of him. Pontius Pilate can put up a sign saying, The King of the Jews.

[48 : 50] This man has gotten rid of. Hated and despised. Rejected. He's finished.

He's gone. It looks like death has won. It looks like death has triumphed. But it was not the end for Jesus.

Although Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus come and they take the body of Jesus down from the cross. And they bury him in the garden tomb. It's not the end.

Because early in the morning on the first day of the week, the women go to the tomb ready to properly embalm the body. They too expect that this is in fact the end.

They discover that the stone has actually been rolled away. That the impossible has happened. That Jesus has risen. Certain death has given way to certain life.

[50 : 00] And there is a triumph and a victory over death, therefore, in the victory of Jesus. That the defeat of death is real.

And again, it's horrific. It's horrific in the power of it. The resurrection of Jesus. It was a powerful event.

Terrified the Roman soldiers who were guarding the tomb. Terrified the Roman authorities and the Jewish authorities who thought this man is gone. Kind of terrifies the disciples as well.

Because they don't see how death can be overcome. This is a mighty act of God. It's only possible if you defeat the reason for death.

If sin in its fullness is paid for so that the curse of God is lifted.

[51 : 16] Now, in Jonah's case, that's ultimately not the whole truth. Because he still needs the salvation of the Lord that is found in Christ. And he confesses that as he comes to the end of his prayer.

But for Jesus, that is where it's found. That's where the truth is. That in his death, he paid for all the consequences of sin to be lifted.

For the curse to go. For salvation. For his people. And today, that's what we can sing of.

That's why we can join with Jonah in singing and joy at what has happened to us. And what has happened for us. Jesus has not only died.

But he has risen. And it means that for us, life is now possible. For all the difficult things that we are going to experience as we go through our lives in this world.

[52 : 25] God, the fullness of life is ours. It has already begun. Because Jesus has defeated death. And we may have to endure the reality of physical death.

But not the finality of it. Because we do so with the hope of the resurrection. Because we do so knowing that we share with Jesus.

His victory. That the power of death has been smashed. Totally destroyed. And its grip over us is gone.

Which leads us to that great proclamation that Jonah has as he comes to his conclusion. That salvation belongs to the Lord. It's his now to give. Just as God appointed a great fish to swallow up Jonah.

He has appointed a greater salvation for us. That today we look back 2,000 years ago on the work of Jesus. And we say, that is it. It is finished. In his own words.

[53 : 25] It's done. It's paid for. And today, our release from death. And our release from sin. Is in no way dependent on what we can do.

It's in no way dependent on us saying, well I've repented enough. It's in no way dependent on us saying, I've done enough good works. It's in no way dependent on us saying, we've had to earn this.

I'm so often struck by that at the end of, I don't know if any of you ever watched. The film Saving Private Ryan. At the end of it, Captain Miller, the leader of the squad that had been sent to rescue him.

Has seen his whole unit devastated. Wiped out. He himself is about to die. And he says to Ryan, earn this. As if somehow his redemption is something that he can earn.

And that's the way we think. We think our redemption has to be earned. It has to be paid for. It has to be somehow merited on our part. And even as Christians, we forget the gospel in that regard.

[54 : 32] We say to ourselves, there's something I can do that will get me out of this drowning experience of sin and death. Until we remember, God has appointed not an idol for us.

Not something that we can erect for our own salvation. But he has appointed Christ. The hero of his people. The great fish who has defeated death.

Who has paid for sin. And who brings salvation and healing in his wings. This is what Jonah says. All those who pay regard to vain idols forsake their hope of steadfast love.

And what vain idols are we clinging to today? Do we cling to the idol of our own righteousness? Do we cling to the idols of our own goodness? Do we cling to the idols of our service in the church?

Do we cling to the idols of perhaps our faithfulness in our marriages? Do we cling to the idols of our success? Do we cling to the idols of whatever we may have accomplished and done with our lives?

[55 : 43] Well, if we do, we give up all hope of this thing. Steadfast love of the chesed of God. Of God's love for the unlovable.

Of God's covenant grace towards his people. That's what chesed means. God's covenant love. That's what all we can cling to today.

It's just the fact that God from all eternity entered into a covenant with his son where he said, For those folk gathered in North Harris Free Church in Tarbot this Sunday morning.

For those folk, you will go and die. And Jesus said, Yes. And he went into the belly of the fish.

He went into death for you and for me. Salvation belongs to the Lord.

[56 : 49] And today that is offered in fullness to each one of us. Let's pray. Let's pray. What a salvation.

What a saviour that we have in Jesus. And so Lord, may we today be filled with a sense of wonder and awe at what he has done. May we be consumed, in fact, with that knowledge that Christ has died for his people and that salvation has been accomplished in its fullness for us.

May we today be able to rest in that. We need, Lord, so often to be brought back to seeing the fullness of the gospel and the beauty of Christ. To see that ugly place that he went to.

The scars that he bore. The torments that he endured. But may we remember that in all of it he emerged victorious in the fullness of everlasting life.

And so may we be filled today with the hope of the resurrection and stand firm and bold in that truth. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. We're going to sing in conclusion that same psalm that we were singing at the beginning, Psalm 116.

[58 : 11] We're going to sing the second half of this psalm just now. I think from verse... What's it there anyway? Verse 9. Yeah. Am I in the land of those that live?

Will walk the Lord before? I did believe, therefore I spoke. I was afflicted sore. Let's stand to sing to God's praise. NINGNINGNINGNINGNINGNING! NING! NING! NING I was a gifted soul.

I said when I was in my days, The Lord met priority.

What shall I render to the Lord, For all this gives to me?

I lost salvation to the cup, On God's name will I call, I've paid my vows now to the Lord, Before His people all.

[60 : 10] Dear in God's sight is His saint's death, Thy servant, Lord, am I?

Thy servant, sure, Thy hand is sung, My bands thou didst untie.

And God brings I to thee, He will give, And on God's name will call, I've paid my vows now to the Lord, Before His people all.

Within the courts of God's own house, Within the midst of thee, O city of Jerusalem, Praise to the Lord, Forgive me.

By the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, The love of God the Father, And the fellowship of God the Holy Spirit, Be with each one of you now and always. Amen. Amen.