

The Lord is my Salvation

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Date: 02 February 2025

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[0 : 0 0] Okay. I think first, it'd be good to, before I read chapter two, I'll give a bit of an overview of chapter one, just in case anyone missed last week. So in chapter one, God comes to Jonah and he says, Jonah, I want you to go preach to the people of Nineveh. And Jonah says, nah, and he runs off in the opposite direction. He gets in a boat and he's sleeping in the boat and God sends a storm. And then the people in the boat come to Jonah and they say to him, you know, pray to your God for us. We need all the help we can get to save us. But instead, Jonah says, you know what, throw me overboard. You know, that'll sort things out. Just chuck me in the water. Everything will be fine. And so they throw him in and he gets swallowed up by a huge fish. And that's when we get to chapter two. So I'll read that. It should be on page 928 of the church Bibles. 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 deep in the realm of the dead, I called for help. And you listened to my cry. You hurled me into the depths, into the very heart of the seas. And the current swirled about me. All your waves and breakers swept over me. I said, I have been banished from your sight. Yet I will look again towards your holy temple. The engulfing waters threatened me. The deep surrounded me. Seaweed was wrapped around my head. To the roots of the mountain I sank down. The earth beneath barred me in forever. But you, Lord my God, brought my life up from the pit. When my life was ebbing away, I remembered you, Lord. And my prayer rose to you, to your holy temple. Those who cling to worthless idols, turn away from God's love for them. But I, with shouts of grateful praise, will sacrifice to you. What I have vowed, I will make good. I will say, salvation comes from the Lord. And the Lord commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land.

Now, if we look at all the chapters in Jonah, chapter 2 stands out for one reason. Every other chapter in Jonah, it's all narrative. It's all action. It's Jonah went here. God did this. But instead, in Jonah chapter 2, almost the entirety of it is made up with a prayer from Jonah to God.

And so you might think, well, why is this here? And what can this teach us? And there's two things we can take from Jonah chapter 2. First is, this is a prayer from Jonah to God. This is him pouring out his heart before God. Here, we get real insight into who Jonah is deep down. And the second thing is, this is the biggest section of Jonah continuously talking. Every other prophetic book is mostly made up of prophecies and things the prophets are saying. But this entire section, Jonah's prayer, is probably more than anything else Jonah says combined. And here's the center, this is almost the center, actually, of the book of Jonah. And so we think, well, what's that got to do with us?

[3 : 5 2] When we look at who Jonah is, we'll discover something about who we are. And therefore, we see this message of Jonah's isn't a message so much for Nineveh. But this message we've got here in his prayer is also a message for us, for you and for me today. Now, firstly, so that's the things, that's all things we're going to look at. Who Jonah is, what's his message, and how that applies to us.

The first thing is who Jonah is. Sometimes it's said that really you never get a true understanding of who someone is until they're right about to die. A good example I like of this is in the Spider-Man films, or some of them. They're in the Spider-Man films, in the comics. There's a character called J. Jonah Jameson. The name's just a coincidence, luckily. J. Jonah Jameson is, in the Spider-Man universe, he runs a newspaper that Peter Parker, who's Spider-Man's real name, works for him. And Peter's job is to bring J. Jonah Jameson pictures of Spider-Man. So, J. Jonah Jameson can write all these sensationalist articles about Spider-Man. And because Peter is Spider-Man, he takes all the best pictures. And so you might think that Mr. Jameson would like Peter, that he'd be a big fan of him. But actually, every interaction, he's rude to Peter, he's a terrible boss, and he also hates

Spider-Man. All his articles are talking about how, you know, Spider-Man's a menace, he's a terror to New York City. And it turns out, it just seems like he's writing these articles just because he's after money. So, based on our first impression of this guy, he's awful, he's rubbish, he's just there to make Spider-Man's life worse. But what often happens in the comics, in the films, is the writers give us a deeper insight into this character. From the superficial, right down to his heart.

And often, along with that, we get transformation of the character. And this happens in one of the films, when the Green Goblin, who's like the big bad guy of the film, he's on the hunt for Spider-Man.

And so he breaks into the newspaper office, and he grabs J. Jonah Jameson by the throat, and he says, you know, tell me who's taking the pictures of Spider-Man. And, you know, at this point, he's being threatened with death. And by our initial understanding of who this guy is, we think, this guy's not a nice guy. He's just after money. The first thing he's going to do is sell out Peter. He doesn't care about him. But then, something really interesting happens.

[6 : 49] It's that he says, oh, I don't know who the guy is. His pictures come by mail. It's anonymous. I've never met him. He lies in the face of death to save someone else. It's a complete, it's completely, who he is deep inside is completely different from our first impression. And this happens in several of his appearances. There's other points where, after some similar traumatic experience, he becomes more sympathetic to Spider-Man. He's more of a father figure to Peter.

And so we see that there's this, from his first appearance, there's a deepening, a change, a transformation he is. But this only comes about because he has this near brush with death.

And it's the same thing for our Jonah. If we take the Jonah we see in chapter one, he's a bit cocky. He's a bit laid back. He thinks, oh, you know, I don't really need to bother doing what God asked me to do. Even at the point of being of the storm, of God clearly angry with him, he seems to think, well, I prefer to just die to be thrown into the storm than to even do what God tells me to do. And it almost brings us to think, God, did you make a mistake here? Like, you really chose this guy to be your prophet? Like, was there just no better options going around?

But then, in chapter two, the situation changes. So we look here at Jonah's description of when he's first in the water. In my distress, I called to the Lord and he answered me. From the deep in the realm of the dead, I called for help. And you listened to my cry. You hurled me into the depths, into the very hearts of the sea. And all your currents swirled about me. All your waves and breakers swept over me.

And down in verse five, the engulfing waters threatened me. The deep surrounded me. Seaweed was wrapped around my head. To the roots of the mountains, I sank down. The earth beneath barred me in forever.

[9 : 04] So this moment, as far as Jonah's aware, he's dying. Jonah doesn't know what's going to happen. He doesn't know there's a big fish waiting for him. In Jonah's mind, this is it. And gone is the Jonah that we saw in chapter one, where he's like, oh, throw me in, guys. It'll be great. At this moment, he's panicking. But what do we see? Like, what does Jonah do in this moment when he's been brought to the point of death? We see that in his distress, he calls for God. If you're looking for seven, when my life was ebbing away, I remembered you, Lord, and my prayer rose to your holy temple.

So actually, deep down in Jonah somewhere, there is that trust in God. And this situation is not a coincidence, right? So this was God's plan from the very start. So you can see this in what Jonah says, like in verse three, you hurled me into the depths. All your waves and breakers swept over me.

This is something that God's doing to Jonah. It's almost like he's tearing back the layers in Jonah to see. He's kind of saying to Jonah, you know, I know deep down, you can put on a front all you want. I know deep down, you're someone who knows that you need my help. Because at this point, Jonah has come to the realization in the face of death, there's nothing he can do to save himself.

He needs to put his trust in God. And even more than that, it's not just that God is revealing something about who Jonah is deep down. He's also using this process to transform Jonah, to change Jonah. Now, it's true, God chose Jonah at the start. But it's not that he chose him because he was already the perfect prophet. But he knew that he needed to transform Jonah into becoming someone who can do his will. If there's one good thing we can say about Jonah, it's that he seems to know his stuff, right? There's actually, if you look at all the things Jonah says about God in the book of Jonah, he never says anything that's factually incorrect.

[11 : 23] He's got all the right knowledge up here. But it's in here that's the problem. Jonah knows that God's merciful. He knows that he needs to trust in God to save him. But he's not had the experience of God's grace in his life. And so what God is doing here is he's, not only is he bringing Jonah to the point of death, but he's bringing almost his judgment, his wrath upon Jonah, so that Jonah can realize that he too needs to cry out to God for mercy, that he needs God to save him and not himself. And the reason he needs to understand this is because there's no way for Jonah to go and to preach to Nineveh and say, this is God's message that you need to repent, you need to turn back to God.

There's no way Jonah can preach that message if he has not first received God's grace. God's message that you need to pray. And so that's who Jonah is. And so let's think about who we are. Because actually, we're actually quite in a similar situation to Jonah. For Jonah in the sea, death was certain. And for us, death is also certain. You will die. Every single person will die. And like Jonah, Jonah, in the face of death, we're completely helpless. There's nothing that you can do, there's nothing that I can do by ourselves to overcome death. Not to mention, as well, God's judgment on us for turning away from him. There's no way we as humans can do anything to escape that.

And like Jonah, we often can live in a way that, you know, we know it hypothetically in our heads, but it's in the back of our minds. You know, is it really that urgent to do what God's telling me to do? Does it really matter that much? Death's just somewhere off in the future, maybe. And I think especially in modern society, it's very easy to put these things away. We live in a very secular society.

To talk about God's judgment to many people would seem strange. We've got modern medicine now. I mean, it's quite like, it's quite possible there's people here who've grown up their whole lives and they've never seen a dead body. Death just isn't something that's present in a lot of our lives. However, this is quite like an unusual experience. If you went back, for example, to the Middle Ages, if you lived in the Middle Ages, death was just an everyday reality. You could have 10 children and only two of your children might make it to adulthood. And then you have the plagues, a quarter of Europe, a third of Europe dying. Think, if a third of the people we knew had suddenly died, we would have a very different relationship to death. It's not something we can shove in the back of our minds. It's something that is present. And you can see this in how medieval people lived. Imagine, if you will, you're a medieval peasant, and you've come to church today, and you can't read. So you don't have a Bible sitting in front of you. But what you can do is you can look. And you'd probably look up here, and you'd see something called a doom. And a doom is like a giant painting. And in the middle of the painting, you'd see Jesus. And not nice Jesus, not, oh, you know, Jesus meek and mild with some lambs and some children or something. You'd see Jesus coming in wrath and fury and with his angels and judging the world. And he'd probably be throwing some sinners into hell over here, and the demons would be eating them or something. And as far as church decor goes, to us now, that seems a bit strange.

[15 : 32] It seems a bit over the top. But to people then, that made sense. They wanted to hear about God's judgment. They want to be reminded that there's coming a day when doomsday, when God will come and judge the world. And the same way, they want reminders about death. If you went outside the church, you'd be in a graveyard. And if you read a gravestone, it might not say something very comforting. What it might have instead is a reminder of your mortality. Almost as though the bones themselves are speaking to you. And it might say something like this. As you are now, we once were.

And as we are now, you one day shall be. So the bones are saying, you know, we bones used to be humans, like you, running around, eating, drinking. Now we're bones. You might be alive now, running around, eating, drinking, and you might not like it. But one day, you too will be bones. Now, why did people want to be reminded of that? Why is it important for us to be reminded of the reality of death and of God's judgment? And there's two senses. The first is, is if we are not Christians, what death teaches us, what God teaches, what God's judgment teaches us, is that there's nothing we can do to overcome this ourselves. Most things in life, we can at least pretend we've got this on our own.

We don't need God. When it comes to death, there's no way out. When it comes to God's judgment, there's no way around it. It teaches us, like Jonah, that we need to forget ourselves and instead trust in someone greater, someone who has the power to save us from death. And if you're a

Christian, it also does something. Because in the same way God has chosen, had chosen Jonah, and He had a mission and a purpose for Jonah, God's also chosen you. And He's got purpose for you. He's got plan for you of things He wants to do through you. And like we were with Jonah, where we're like, really, God, you're choosing this guy? He's awful. We might think this about ourselves. We might think, oh, really? God's chosen me? Do I really have the ability, the talent? Am I really faithful enough?

Am I good enough to do what God has asked me to do? But thinking that way, actually, is a total misunderstanding of how God chooses. Because God didn't choose Jonah because he was the best prophet around. God chose Jonah so that He could take Jonah and transform him. Because that's how God's love works. God's love is not like human love. So when we love things, we see something or see someone, and it's got attractive qualities. It's beautiful. It's useful. It's good. And we see that, and those things draw, those qualities of it cause us to love it. But God's totally different from that.

Because remember, God is goodness Himself. So there's nothing in comparison to God that is good. There's nothing that deserves God's love. There's nothing we can do to kind of make ourselves good enough to be chosen by God. But God chooses to love things that are unlovable. He chooses to love the things that are unlovely. And what happens is His love transforms those things to make them lovely.

[19 : 44] It's like John says in 1 John, in this is love, not that we love God. So it's not our action that goes first. It's that God loves us and sent His Son to be the propitiation of our sins.

And similarly, John also says that because God, brothers, because God has loved us, we also ought to love one another. It's only because Jonah receives the mercy and love of God in this moment, only because he knows that he needs the mercy of God when he's dying, that he realizes his position, that he realizes God's love for him. And that transforms him in order that he can preach the message that God's given him to preach. And it's the same thing for us. It's only when we understand our situation, it's only when we understand who we are, that we are humans, that we'll die, that we're under God's judgment, that we realize our need of God. And when we see that God is loving and He has given us His grace, that's what transforms us to love one another.

So that's so much for who Jonah is and so much for who we are. But then we have to get to Jonah's message. Because there's a bit of a problem we've got here, and there's a bit of a problem Jonah's got.

Because it's all very well that Jonah's discovered that he's in the sea, he's discovered that, oh, I need God's help. I'll pray to God and ask Him for my help. But if Jonah drowns, if there's no actual salvation, then he's not going to be a very good preacher, is he?

And it's the same thing for us. Okay, we've learned that we're going to die. We've learned that God will judge us. But what's the means by which God will save us? We know that God can save us, but how does He save us? What's the mechanism behind it? And this is what Jonah actually reveals to us here. And it's not so much in Jonah's exact words that he shows us this. It's in the pattern of what happens to Jonah. So you think about what Jonah's gone through. So Jonah's on the boat, and God sends down a storm, a storm of His anger and His wrath. And Jonah chooses to be thrown overboard into God's wrath. He takes it upon himself to save the others on the boat. And Jonah essentially, in some sense, dies. He's swallowed up by the fish. And then three days later, he comes back. And the pattern of Jonah, like we saw in the earlier Bible reading, the pattern of Jonah is the pattern of Jesus.

[22 : 58] Jesus, just as Jonah was in the fish for three days and three nights. So the Son of Man will be in the belly of the earth for three days and three nights. So Jonah's almost sermon to us. He's preaching to us that the way we are saved, it's not just that we need to be saved, but the way we are saved is through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. But there's a key difference between Jonah's situation and our situation. Because remember, when Jonah was thrown into the water, when he came in the face of God's judgment and the face of death, he knew that he could cry out to God, but he didn't know how God would save him. He didn't know there was a fish, and he didn't even know if God would save him.

He had no guarantee that he, his death was certain, but there was no certainty that God was going to rescue him at all. But that's not the case for us. It's true that we will certainly die, but what's also certain is that because Jesus has died and Jesus has risen again, our death is certain, but also our resurrection is certain. So we, more than Jonah, have a certainty about the future.

And this is very important because not only does this transform us, but it transforms how we think about death and how we think about God's judgment. Because remember, if you're not a Christian, if you don't have Jesus Christ, God's death, death is something to be feared. It's something inevitable. It's something you cannot escape. God's judgment is upon you. You've been disobedient.

You've done evil things. God is angry at you. It's there, and you can't escape it. Like Jonah in the sea, there's nothing you can't escape it. There's nothing you can do. But because we have an understanding of what Jesus Christ has done for us, this changes our relationship to these reminders.

God's judgment isn't something that we have to fear. Because like Jonah taking upon the wrath of the storm, if you will, for the sailors on the boat, Jesus has taken on God's wrath for us. He's brought us forgiveness. In the same way, Jonah died, in a sense, and came back. Jesus died for us, and he conquered death and overcame it. Death is no longer something to be feared. And so when we have these reminders, like you have in the Middle Ages, it's not... These reminders that God gives us about death and about judgment for the Christian are not there to make you scared. God's not trying to, you know, make you quiver and shake in your boots. The point is that God's trying to show you through these things, like he showed Jonah, that you don't need to rely on yourself. It's our instinct to always want to think, oh, I can save myself. I can do it myself. God's like, no, you don't need to trust in yourself. You need to trust in me.

[26 : 32] And he's showing us that in these things, this is him revealing his love to us, his kindness to us, and through what he's done for us in Jesus Christ. And really to sum this all up, it's... This isn't on us at all, right? This wasn't our idea. It's all God's plan from the beginning. So like Jonah.

Jonah... When God comes to Jonah, he tells Jonah, you know, I'm going to call you to be a prophet. That was God's plan.

When Jonah runs away, that's also God's plan. When Jonah's on the boat and God's storm comes and goes angry with him and he gets thrown in and it's upon him and he realizes he needs the mercy and the salvation of God, that's God's plan. And in the fish and being brought back out, that's God's plan as well. And for us, when we realize... Before we're Christian and we see that we're going to die and God's judgment is upon us, we have that realization that we can't trust in ourselves and we need someone greater, someone better than us. That's God working in our lives.

That's also God's plan. And when God sent Jesus to die for us, to give us forgiveness, and when he sent Jesus to... And he brought Jesus back up from the dead. And when Jesus conquered death, that's also God's plan. And in the same way, when God gives us these reminders to transform our hearts, to really press upon us. So not so we have like a knowledge in our heads that, well, you know, Jesus did these things for me and that was nice, but it's a real reality that we really understand deep in our hearts who Jesus is, what he's done for us, and that we need him and that we are thankful to him. And that's what...

This transformation of us and this shaping of us, so that God can use us to share his love with other people, that this is all God's plan from the very beginning. This is something God is doing. You know, Jonah is entirely passive in this chapter. He doesn't really do anything. It's all God's plan from the beginning, even the turning away, even the disobedience. And the same for us, as we're brought through our lives, from being under God's judgment into being saved through Jesus, this wasn't anything we did. It's not on us at all, but it's really under God's hand guiding us through the whole way.

And this is what brings Jonah in the end, when he's experienced this love of God. He... In verse 9, you can see this, but I with shouts of joy, with shouts of grateful praise will sacrifice to you.

[29 : 40] What I have vowed, I make good. And he acknowledges the same thing that we've been discussing here, that salvation, it doesn't come from us, but salvation comes from the Lord.