

A great deliverance

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Date: 26 January 2025

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[0 : 00] So we're actually going to read from verse 17 of chapter 1. And so let's hear God's word together. Chapter 1, verse 17 of Jonah.

Now the Lord provided a huge fish to swallow Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights. 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 currents swirled about me. All your waves and breakers swept over me. I said, Lord, 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.

[1 : 13] Seaweed was wrapped around my head. To the roots of the mountains 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.

Please do keep that open before you as we spend time hearing from God's words together. Wouldn't it have been a wonderful moment to have been there when Jonah was vomited onto dry land by the fish?

[2 : 24] You wouldn't have seen that every day. Practicing gratitude or practicing thankfulness has become a very popular thing. So you'll have seen it if you Google it.

How websites will give you tips about how to practice thankfulness. So one website that I looked up says that practicing thankfulness has incredible effects.

From improving our mental health to boosting our relationships with others. So you have somebody like Robert Emmons. He's a psychology professor and a gratitude, not a graduate researcher, a gratitude researcher at the University of California.

He explains there's two key components of practicing thankfulness. First key component is we affirm the good things we've received. And the second key component is we acknowledge the role other people play in providing our lives with goodness.

So we affirm the good things we have and then we acknowledge the person or the people who have brought that good into our lives. Now if Jonah was to meet Robert Emmons, Jonah would say to him something along these lines, Robert, you're absolutely on the right track here with your gratitude research.

- [3 : 43] We should absolutely affirm the good things that we've received. And we should absolutely thank people who have given these things to us or brought them about in our lives. However, you've missed the most important part of the puzzle.
- The most important piece of the puzzle is to acknowledge that all good things come from God. And so as well as thanking people in your lives, you need to acknowledge that he is the fount of every blessing.
- That he is the one that we should thank first and foremost. And that's what Jonah says in verse 9. I, with shouts of grateful praise or grateful thanks, will sacrifice to you what I have vowed.
- I will make good. I will say salvation comes from the Lord. So Jonah is saying that he acknowledges salvation comes from God and he's going to thank God for it.
- And this is kind of surprising. And the reason it's surprising because you remember that in the first chapter of the book of Jonah, Jonah was running as fast and as far away from God as he could possibly get.
- [4 : 53] And now he's thanking God. So what has brought about the transformation in Jonah? Jonah, how did he move so profoundly from running from God to thanking God?
- And how can we learn from him? Well, let's have a look and think about how we can be thankful to God, why we would want to be thankful to God. First thing we want to reflect on is that we want to be thanking God for what he has saved us from.
- So we want to be thanking God for what he has saved us from. I'm thinking specifically about times in our lives where he has brought us through, where he has saved us from particular circumstances.
- So for Jonah, he was in a time of great distress. So we left him two weeks ago, plunging into the sea.
- And he says in verse one, from inside the fish, Jonah prayed to the Lord, he's God. He said, in my distress, I call to the Lord.
- [5 : 58] And so Jonah's in the belly of the fish. And he's reflecting on a distressing time, which was when he was plunging into the depths of the sea.
- So being inside in the fish wasn't the distress. The distress was going down into the sea, having been thrown in there by the sailors. And it says in verse five, the engulfing water threatened me.
- The deep surrounded me. Seaweed was wrapped around my head, which is a very distressing picture that he's painting. I've never jumped into the sea, and I never will.
- I never planned to do that. But as Jonah plunged into the sea, he is having this experience of great distress, where the seaweed is wrapping around his head.
- And you know what it's like when you even walk into the sea a little bit. The seaweed starts to wrap itself around your ankles, and it's all slimy and cold and wet. And Jonah's experiencing that to a whole other degree, a whole other level.
- [7 : 05] It's as though he's being swallowed by the sea. In verse five, it's engulfing waters. It's the deep surrounding him. It's the seaweed wrapping itself around him.
- And of course, the distress is not primarily about the seaweed or the waters. The distress is about the fact that he's going to die. I don't know, did he take a deep breath as the sailors threw him over?
- Just before he hit the water, did he take a deep breath to see how long he could hold on? But now as he plunges down, you know that his heart is going to be racing.

It's going to be cold, and his lungs are going to feel like they're going to burst at any minute as he tries to cling on to that one breath that he's been able to take. This distress is what God has saved him from.

And more than that, it's death that God has saved him from. Death has its grip on Jonah, and yet God has saved him from it. You see, he's plunging down to his death in the depths of the sea.

[8 : 16] And so at a surface level, Jonah is thanking God that he has saved him from distress and from death.

That's at a surface level. But there's a deeper level to this. There's a deeper level. There's something deeper that God has saved him from.

You see, in verse 4, Jonah says, I have been banished from your sight. Now, Jonah being banished from God's sight is exactly what Jonah wanted in chapter 1.

He was trying to get away from God. And now God has given him what he's wanted. He has allowed Jonah, in one sense, to be as far from God as humanly possible, as he has plunged down into the sea.

This is what he wanted, and this is what he has been given. As he bought that ticket to go to Tarshish, it all looked very polite.

[9 : 23] It all looked very businesslike. One ticket to Tarshish, please. It wasn't like there was this massive, catastrophic moral failure. And yet what was going on in Jonah's heart was, I want to get away from God.

And so, in a sense, he gets a taste of what it is like to get away from God, as God has banished him from his sight in one sense. And so what you start to realize is that Jonah, at a surface level, has been saved from distress and from death.

But at a deeper level, he's been saved from destroying his relationship with God, from cutting himself off from God. Jonah has realized now what a bad idea it is to try and distance himself from God, as he has got a little taste of that.

He realizes now this isn't impersonal. This is personal. You can see that in the way he speaks about the sea.

In verse 3, Jonah says, You hurled me into the depths. Which is a striking way of putting it, because back in chapter 1, you know that it was the sailors who threw him into the sea.

[10 : 41] The sailors hurled him into the sea. But Jonah now realizes that actually it was God who was behind this. And he says in verse 3, All your waves and your breakers swept over me.

So now he's acknowledging that though, at one level, the waves and the breakers and so on are impersonal, that actually it is an expression of God's displeasure, God's anger towards Jonah, that he would run from him, that he would be unwilling to do what God has called him to do.

And so as Jonah reflects on all that, he is thanking God. Thank you, God, that you are wiser than I am, that you have saved me from this distress, saved me from death, saved me from destroying my relationship with you, though that is what I was trying to do.

Years ago, I was cycling down a hill and my friend was beside me on his bike and it was a steep hill and we were really going really fast, like we were absolutely going full pedal, full throttle down this hill and the next minute, our handlebars just touched off each other just for a brief moment, but it was enough to unbalance both of us.

I went flying over the handlebars and hit the ground face first on this steep hill and it was distressing and potentially even more distressing for my friend looking at my face covered in blood.

[12 : 22] As I reflect on that, at the time I didn't realize it, but now I realize it was God who was watching over me to save me from that distress.

Whatever the other reasons were, it was ultimately God watching over me to save me from that and so I want to thank God that he has saved me from that and it could have been worse. If there was a truck coming down the hill after us, it could have been death and I reflect on that and I think that wasn't coincidence, coincidence, coincidence, that wasn't chance.

Ultimately, that was God's kindness in sparing me and perhaps for you, as you reflect on your own life, you'll know that there were times of deep distress or even times where you came close to death or perhaps like Jonah, this distress was as a result of trying to flee from God and yet this morning, we want to say thank you to God that he has saved us from that, that he has saved us from distress and death and from destroying our relationship with him in days gone by.

And so Jonah is thanking God and we want to thank God for how he has done that. And we also want to thank God for why he has done it.

So why does Jonah get spared? Why did I get spared on that occasion on the bike or in any other occasion in life? Jonah recognizes it is God who has rescued him.

[14 : 02] In verse 6 of the second half of the verse, he says, you Lord, my God brought my life up from the pit. And you realize with Jonah, it wasn't because he deserves it. He ran from God.

For me, it wasn't because I deserved it that God saved me from distress on that occasion. At one level, it's because we cry out to him.

It's because Jonah cries out to God. In verse 2, I called to the Lord from deep in the realm of the dead. I called for help. And so Jonah is brought into this deep water realizing there's nothing left for me to trust in.

There's nothing solid, literally and figuratively in my life. There's nothing for me to cling on to. God is the only one that I can trust in now. He's the only one who can rescue me, the only one who can save me.

And so he calls out to God as an expression of trust in God. And it is trust because in the second half of verse 4, he says, yet I will look again towards your holy temple.

[15 : 07] He has this trust that he hasn't been ultimately cut off or separated from God. He thinks about this place where God's presence is made known in his temple. And he says, I haven't been banished ultimately from your presence, God.

And as he cries out to God, he remembers God in verse 7. When my life was ebbing away, I remembered you, Lord.

Remembered what God was like. Have you had one of those moments where you suddenly wake up and realize, I've forgotten what God is like. I've forgotten about God. And then you remember him and how good and kind and loving he is.

And you call out to him again to save you from the distress that you're in. Well, at one level, that's why God saves Jonah because Jonah cries out to him.

But that's only the surface level because the deeper level is that God has saved Jonah because of God's love. In verse 8, Jonah says, those who cling to worthless idols turn away from God's love for them.

[16 : 24] And what he's implying there is that he has again realized that if he turns away from God, he's forsaking God's love. He's missing out on the greatest relationship that he can have, the greatest love that he could ever know.

He realizes that it is because of God's love that he has been saved. As the Jesus Storybook Bible puts it, God's never stopping, never giving up, unbreaking, always and forever love.

And you realize now that even though at one level it is because Jonah cried out to God that God saved him. And we do need to cry out to God in our distress. At a deeper level, it is God's love.

That is the reason why he saves us. We're not to think that Jonah cried out to God and God suddenly started thinking, oh, I better get a plan in place. He cried out to me.

Where's that fish? No, the fish was primed and ready to go. God knew this had to be quick. Jonah only has so much oxygen left in his lungs. And so that fish, you can imagine, it was just waiting in the wings for God to say the word.

[17 : 33] I remember years ago hearing about a Mercedes car. I presume they still do this and probably even better. But it had sensors on the accelerator.

And so if you were in a situation where you needed a brake really, really fast and you lift your foot off the accelerator, it sensed that. And what the car did was it moved the brake pads in really close.

So like as close as it could possibly be without touching the discs. And so that by the time you got your foot to the brake in those couple of seconds, less than a couple of seconds, it was primed and ready to go.

So you slammed on the brakes. The car stopped you. It's pretty impressive. And what God does here is that God's love is such that the moment Jonah calls out to him, God is ready.

He had to act fast in Jonah's situation. That fish swallows him up and he's saved. Now it doesn't always need to be quick. It isn't always quick.

[18 : 40] But it is always because of God's love for us that he hears our cries. His steadfast, never stopping, never giving up, unbreaking, always and forever love.

this is why God saves us from distress, saves us from death, so that when we walk through the door that represents us being saved from whatever distress it is we're experiencing, when we're walking through it, we say, well, it's because I cried out to him.

And then we look back through that same door and over the door it says, because he loves me. We realize on reflection, I realize on reflection, why has God saved me from any distress in my life?

Yeah, because I call out to him but more so because he loves me. And so with Jonah, we want to thank God that he has heard our cry because of his love.

when we have nothing left to trust in and before we have nothing left to trust in, we can acknowledge our need for him to save us.

[19 : 54] Some years ago, we were in a church where a lady was being baptized and she was saying a little bit about how she had experienced God's work in her life, God's love in her life and she reflected on just a little bit of that journey and she said this, I said to my friend, believe me, my life is destroyed.

What is committed is unforgivable. My friend looks at me and says, no, Jesus forgives everything. Everything, even the sin you think is the worst, the one you think you deserve death for.

You just need to ask his forgiveness. Her eyes were full of love, compassion, understanding and care. That night, I went to my room and cried and cried. I prayed and asked the Lord to help me.

There's the crying out to God to forgive me, to be with me. That night, my cage was open. The dark tunnels were not dark anymore. I could see the road and the road was not the road of dying.

The road had suddenly changed. It became a road of hope, love, care, compassion, understanding. Since then, I am not saying it was easy, but I am saying this, that the darkness, the sinful life, the anger, the hate, the jealousy, the aggression, the horrible sense of being closed in a dark cage is gone.

[21 : 23] Jesus has defeated it for me. By God's grace, I am here in the light. Praise the Lord always and forever. She was thanking God because she recognized that God had saved her because of his great love.

And we too can thank God that he has saved us by his great love. Let's just reflect lastly on how he goes about this.

So how does God go about saving Jonah? That would be an interesting question to mull over, so let's mull it over. Jonah is thanking God for how he goes about saving him.

You can imagine Jonah's cry for help. And were the sailors up there still on the deck of the boat saying, did you hear something?

I thought I heard something. No, I didn't hear anything. Of course, they weren't saying that because Jonah's not audibly crying for help. If he opens his mouth as he plunges down, he's going to get a mouthful of salt water.

[22 : 37] His cry for help to God is internal. It is a heart cry. It is a silent prayer to God. And isn't it amazing that nobody in the whole world heard that cry from Jonah in the depths of the sea?

But God heard it. God heard it as if it was shouted from the mountaintops. What an encouragement to us that even if we are on a hospital bed unable to speak, that we can cry out to God and he hears us, though nobody else does.

Well, Jonah cries out to God and God goes about saving him in an unusual way.

It has to be said in verse 17, the Lord provided a huge fish to swallow Jonah and Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights. And in verse 10 of chapter 2, the Lord commanded the fish and it vomited Jonah onto dry land.

And as you hear that, the tendency is either to start doing a little bit of research and finding out, is it possible that a big fish could swallow a man and they survive three days and three nights?

[23 : 53] And you kind of may come to the conclusion, well, it's possible that they could be swallowed, but the digestive juices, I mean, what about that? And you just think, well, I'm not so sure.

Skeptical. You start to look at historical accounts of people who've been swallowed by fish and survive and so on. But if you do that, it's kind of missing the point because the point is that God has intervened miraculously.

He has done something incredible. He has done something very unusual in appointing this fish specifically to swallow Jonah. And as we are told that he's in the belly of the fish three days and three nights, what's that saying to us is he's as good as dead.

He should be dead. You do not survive this unless God has orchestrated it. God has worked in a way to enable him to survive.

And so, yes, research the histories. Yes, research the science of it. But ultimately, we need to arrive at the conclusion that the Bible concludes with that this is a miraculous work of God to save Jonah.

[25 : 05] This is the way in which he has gone about it. We need to reflect on that. That this is how God saves Jonah by allowing this fish, appointing this fish to swallow him so that he's in the belly of the fish instead of the belly of the sea.

And isn't this ironic and maybe even humorous that the fish was more willing to do what God asked it to do than Jonah was.

So Jonah, back in chapter one, God says to Jonah, Jonah, go. Speak to the Ninevites. Jonah says, no. Imagine if the fish had taken that approach. Fish, go and rescue Jonah.

I'm not doing that. Jonah would be at the bottom of the ocean. It's amazing how God saves Jonah at a surface level through this miraculous appointing of this fish to swallow him and to preserve him until he is vomited out onto the dry land.

But again, there's something more amazing at a deeper level here. something far more miraculous because you realize that Jonah was a man who was hell-bent on getting away from God.

[26 : 32] Jonah was a man who was in outright rebellion against God. Even though he had known God and heard about God, he was deciding to go his own way. Even if it put his own life at risk, even if it put other people's lives at risk, he was a man who was as good as dead.

He was a man who was deserving of death. And the lengths that God goes to to save him from what he deserves, to save him from the good and right anger of God towards his sin that are seen in these waves and billows, God's waves and breakers breaking over him.

We need to realize, though, that the way ultimately God saves Jonah is not by sending a whale, or a big fish, sorry. The way God ultimately saves Jonah was by sending his son, Jesus.

We need to realize that. That what Jonah has been ultimately saved from is not from the sea, but from God. And the way in which God has done that is by appointing his son to go to die, to experience God's waves and billows in the place of Jonah and in the place of all who trust in him.

Jesus says in Luke's gospel, I have a baptism to be baptized with. And when he says that, he's not thinking about his baptism at the hands of John the Baptist.

[27 : 59] When he says that, he's thinking about his death. He describes his death as the idea of being submerged under water. And as he reflects on that, he says, how great is my distress until it is accomplished.

Jesus knew that as he faced into the cross and as he describes it as being overwhelmed by torrents of water, that what he was ultimately going to be experiencing was the right anger of God towards the sins of his people.

And he wasn't just going to get a taste of them. It wasn't going to be a near-death experience. It was going to be an actual death experience. That he would be totally consumed by it until the right anger of God was totally exhausted.

And as Jesus struggles to get oxygen into his lungs and the cross and perhaps felt like they were going to burst, we need to realize that what he was experiencing was what Jonah should have experienced, but that Jonah was saved from.

We need to realize that this is what we should have experienced, but that we have been saved from. And so what we need to appreciate as we see this incredible, miraculous story of this fish being appointed to save Jonah, this is the way God has gone about it.

[29 : 25] We need to see more than that. The incredible, miraculous appointment of God's Son to save us. And as we reflect on that, it causes us to be thankful.

And so let's cultivate thankfulness like nobody else can. Thankfulness that he has saved us from distress, that he has saved us from death, that he has saved us from destroying our relationship with him.

Thankful to God that he has heard our cry and responded in love, saving us. thankful to God that he has appointed Jesus as the way in which we are saved.

And as we do that, as we dwell on that, and as we express our thanks to God, we will be transformed like Jonah, recognizing how he has done a miraculous thing in our lives.

So we're going to pray. I'll pray in a few moments' time. I'm just going to leave a few moments of silence that we can just reflect internally. maybe we need to be crying out to God.

[30 : 37] Maybe we're in distress at the moment, asking him to rescue us from that. Maybe we need to be thanking God for how we have seen him save us through Jesus.

And so let's pray and respond to what we've heard. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Father, we want to thank you, Lord, from hearts that have been transformed, transformed by knowing that you have pursued us in love.

Father, that what we deserved, Jesus has experienced instead of us. And Father, we want to praise you because you saving us is far more miraculous than what you did in the life of Jonah through this big fish.

Lord, that you have brought us to safety in a way that we can never have done ourselves, that you have brought us into perfect safety.

[32 : 31] Lord, that we have refuge in you. And Father, we praise you for that. And thank you for that. Help us, Lord, to cultivate thankfulness as we reflect on what you have done for us, how you have gone about it.

And Lord, we do ask that we would be quick to do this in the week ahead. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.