

Salvation belongs to the Lord

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[0 : 00] To Jonah chapter 1 and 2. And find it on page 925.! She said, if no one confesses, I'm going to punish the whole class.

So I did. I walked to the teacher and said, it was me, sorry. And then she said, you go home and then ask your parents to pay a certain amount of money to replace the lamp.

So I went home. My mom wasn't there. I was so scared because I knew that I was going to get a smack on the bottom.

And my mom came. I was trembling. And then before I could say anything, I fell in tears.

And I said, sorry, mom. I broke one of the lamps at school. And now we have to pay for it. And then my mom kneeled down and hugged me.

[1 : 31] And then she said, oh, Ricky, don't cry about that. It's okay. I'm not going to punish you. Here's some money you pay the school and you say sorry to them. I wonder if you've ever experienced that.

When you were certain that judgment was coming and it's deserved because you did something wrong, but you received something else entirely.

Well, that is Jonah chapter 2. In chapter 1, Jonah heard God's word and he ran away. He fled from God.

He endangered others. He finally was thrown into the water to die. In a sense, that's a fair consequence for his rebellion towards God.

Scripture is clear about this. The wages of sin is death. Now, some people might be uncomfortable with that. But this is justice.

[2 : 34] You see, God is not merely one being amongst others. He is the source of life itself. To reject God, to run away from him, to say no to him, is to separate oneself from the source of life.

And so death is the deserved natural and moral consequence for turning away from the giver of life. Jonah knew that.

In fact, in chapter 1, when the sailors asked what must be done to calm the storm, Jonah offered himself. He said, pick me up and throw me into the sea.

It's my fault. Jonah knew that his death was what justice required. And so after he was thrown into the sea, the sailors assumed he was as good as dead.

The sailors said to God in verse 14, don't let us die for taking this man's life. The story in chapter 1 makes sure that Jonah's death was expected, required, and deserved.

[3 : 50] He ran away from God. He disobeyed God. But then the story takes a turn that tells us something profound about the heart of God.

In verse 17, Now the Lord provided a great fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights. The Lord provided the fish.

The fish is a provision. Some people might see Jonah being swallowed by a fish as the punishment. I certainly did when I was a child.

I used to hear it, I used to hear the story like, oh, Jonah didn't listen to God, so he got eaten by a big fish. Even when I was discerning God's call into ministry, and then I kept saying no all the time, and my pastor during that time said, be careful, if you keep running away, you're going to get eaten by a big fish.

In that version of the story, the fish is the punishment. You run away, you disobey, you get eaten by a big fish. But that misunderstands the passage. The fish is not judgment, it's rescue.

[5 : 15] God saved Jonah from drowning. At the very edge of deserved death, God provided the fish to pick him up. It's amazing if you think about it.

God commanded Jonah, his prophet, to go to Nineveh. That's his job, and he did not obey.

And so God commanded creation, the storm and the fish, to stop Jonah from rebelling and to rescue him from the consequence of his rebellion. And unlike Jonah, creation obeyed.

Now this tells us something about God and his heart. Okay, he's powerful. He can command creation, and creation listens to him.

But also, he does not delight in death, even deserved death. As 2 Peter says, he does not want anyone to perish, but everyone to repent.

[6 : 31] God is not waiting to crush us when we make mistakes. He pursues us so we might return. The story shows this in the next verse.

From inside the fish, Jonah prayed to the Lord his God. Jonah had rebelled and run away from God, but God was still the Lord his God.

The covenant relationship had not been broken, even though Jonah had run away from God. God did not let go.

His God is gracious. So now Jonah prayed to God. Now pause for a moment and think about this. If you were inside the belly of a fish, what would you pray for? I would pray to get out immediately. Three days and three nights is too long for me.

[7 : 37] Jonah prayed. In the belly of the fish. Jonah did not. He offered a psalm of praise. In verse 2, 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. Jonah prayed, not like someone waiting to be saved, but like someone who had been saved.

Jonah looked back to his drowning experience when he was sinking beneath the waves. When death was imminent, God rescued him by providing a fish to lift him up from drowning.

Jonah lived because God saved him. We live because God saved us.

The people that we love who have died, live, and will live, because God saved them. And so having encountered this grace that had already saved him, Jonah did not even ask for anything else.

[8 : 56] He praised. He praised. Jonah was describing in detail what it felt like to be drowning.

He recited his experience back to God, how God saved him. But notice how he said, You hurled me into the depths.

Was it God who caused all this? Wasn't it his own rebellion? In verse 4 he said, I have been banished from your sight.

Didn't he banish himself from God's sight by running away from him? What's going on here? Well, I don't think Jonah was blaming God for his judgment, because in the previous verse, he already said that God rescued him.

I don't think Jonah was denying that it was his rebellion that had brought him into the depths. I think what he's doing here is recognizing that even deserved judgment remains under God's sovereign hand.

[10 : 32] And that is what makes this a prayer of praise rather than a prayer of complaint. Because if judgment itself is governed by the God who's merciful, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love, and Jonah knows this because he's going to say that in the next chapter.

If judgment is in the sovereign hands of that God, then there is hope. That is a comforting thought.

Sometimes I give my kids a time out in their bedroom for doing something naughty. But they know that when I do that, they know that I'm giving the punishment as their father who loves them.

Because anytime they apologize and come in for a hug, I will always receive them back with a hug. Always.

They know that. Now, I'm not slow to anger or abounding in steadfast love. This God is.

[11 : 49] So how much more would he save the people that he loves if they cry out to him, even if they have rebelled against him? Like our New Testament reading in Romans 10 says, everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

Jonah experienced that firsthand. Even his judgment is in the hands of the merciful God who loves him and who's ready to have mercy on him.

And so Jonah made a statement of hope at the end of verse 4. Yet I will look again towards your holy temple. Even in the darkest moment in the belly of the fish, full of darkness, Jonah can still look towards the presence of God in the temple because he's assured of God's salvation.

That God is his God. And that God is merciful and slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

Now, Jonah's God is our God.

If our God is this faithful God who is merciful and slow to anger and does not delight in death, even deserve death, then what do we do when we know we are in the depths?

[13:27] I have a friend who used to meet up to read the Bible one-to-one with someone who doesn't know Jesus, who didn't believe in Jesus. But even after a few years of meeting up to read the Bible and knowing the gospel, this person still refused to accept Jesus for so long.

So my friend asked, my friend asked, why? And they answered, because I think I'm still not good enough to turn to God. So my friend asked, well, are you bad enough to be saved by God? God does not save those people who think that they are good and don't need to be saved. God saves those people who cry out to him in hopelessness, like Jonah.

Jonah's God, our God, is merciful, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love, and he does not delight in death.

He saves those who cry out to him. So do you need to be saved? Do you want to be saved from whatever deserved consequences that you're suffering now or that you know you'll be suffering later?

[14:49] Father, call upon the name of the Lord and you will be saved. Now, Jonah was not finished with recalling God's act of rescue.

So he continues in verse 5. 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. This is the lowest point imaginable.

He even said, but you, Lord my God, brought my life up from the pit. Jonah recalled his dying experience using poetic language as if he had reached the pit of death.

Probably referring to his expectation that he was going to die. He deserved it. He expected finality, no escape. But God saved him.

[16:04] You, Lord my God, brought my life up from the pit. Now, from the perspective of ancient people, this would have been amazing.

In the ancient world, God had, the gods had jurisdiction. You know, the sea gods ruled the sea. The mountain gods ruled the hills.

The gods of the death ruled the realm of the dead. But Jonah's God is amazing. In chapter 1, Jonah went down to Joppa, a place outside of Israel, and yet God, the God of Israel, was there.

He went down to the sea. God was there. He sank to the roots of the mountains. God was there. He approached the realm of death.

God was there. This God is simply superior compared to other gods. Nothing can separate us from him.

[17:09] Not even death. And therefore, Jonah said, verse 7, When my life was ebbing away, I remembered you, Lord, and my prayer rose to you, to your holy temple in Israel.

So even from the depths, somewhere in the sea, outside of Israel, Jonah could turn towards God in the temple, and God would hear him. Because there's no place on earth that God cannot reach.

So Jonah prays, in verse 8, 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. Salvation comes from the Lord, and the Lord only. Not from the ancient gods of Baal or Zeus.

Not from the modern gods of money or success. Not from our obedience. Not from our knowledge. From the Lord.

[18:27] Because he's the only one whose power and grace and mercy and love are so far-reaching and faithful. And so, verse 10, And the Lord commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land.

Jonah was right. His God does save. Jonah was alive because God saves. Now, Jonah's prayer confronts us with a choice.

If salvation truly belongs to the Lord, then everything else we cling to for salvation, for security, for meaning, for purpose, for peace, for joy, is exposed for what it is.

An idol that cannot save. Worthless idols, as Jonah says. We might cling to another deity.

We might seek other gods to fulfill us, to save us. We might cling to ourselves to save us. We might cling to career or to reputation or to approval.

[19 : 43] Those things are worthless idols. And when those things fail us, we feel as helpless as Jonah sinking beneath the waves. This God, this God is superior to all those things that we put our hope in.

Jonah's prayer invites us to loosen our grip on what cannot save us and to place our trust where it belongs, in the Lord alone.

But now, after dealing with the story, I think one question remains.

What about justice? Jonah lived. Okay, like Exodus 34 says, God is gracious, merciful, slow to anger.

That's great. But what about the rest of the description about God in that passage? That he doesn't leave the guilty unpunished. Did he forget about justice with Jonah?

[20 : 57] Did his love and mercy simply overrule his justice? Now, a lot of us here might not like that question because we like the fact that the Lord is compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness.

But for those people who have been victims of injustices, they want justice. They want the God of justice.

So where is justice? And I think this question is necessary in the context of the story because later on in the story, next week, this was the core of Jonah's protest when God chose to spare the Ninevites lives.

The Ninevites were horrible people who delighted in torture and conquest. So when God spared their lives later on in the story, next week we'll read that, Jonah will ask, I knew that you're the God who's merciful and slow to anger and bountiful and steadfast love, but he didn't like that.

Because where is justice then? Well, here, the same question, what about justice towards Jonah?

The answer is not, I think, is not that justice no longer matters to God.

[22 : 29] It's that God had provided a way for his justice and mercy to meet. And we know that way, don't we? that's when Jesus enters the story.

Jesus himself said that, for as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth, in death.

Jonah points to Jesus, but with a big difference. Jonah went into the depths because of his own rebellion.

Jesus went into the depths because of ours. Jonah nearly died, but he was not abandoned by God. God kept chasing him into the depths. Jesus truly died and was abandoned by God. He cried, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

[23 : 32] Jesus was abandoned so we might not be. Jonah's three days in the belly of the fish were for his own restoration, so he might repent.

Jesus' three days in the belly of death were for our restoration through his destruction. The God who rescued Jonah from death, from deserved death, is the same God who would later place that deserved death onto himself in the person of Jesus.

That deserved death that Jonah deserved and that we deserve, he put on himself because Jesus was forsaken when he bore the sins of the world, everyone who turns to God for salvation will never be forsaken.

So Jonah's story is really our story. The story of Jonah relates to me personally because many times I have tried running away from God, rejecting his commands, rejecting his word that I know from scriptures, rejecting his blessings, as if there was something better in this world than him.

That is offensive, isn't it? To say that there are things better than the God who is the source of our lives, our joy, our peace, the God who sent himself to die for us.

[25 : 18] And how did he respond to our offensive rebellion? Was it not with the same grace and mercy he showed Jonah? Haven't we seen the same heart of God all alone in the person of Jesus?

So what do we do in light of that? We have encountered the same gracious God that Jonah encountered. What do we do? Well, like Jonah, we recall our salvation over and over again, naming what God has done for us when we could not save ourselves, when we were trying to run away and trying to disobey God.

Just like he chased Jonah, he also chased us. He even came down here as a human to be with us and to die for us.

Let's recite our saving experience back to God in our prayers and in our praise. And so like Jonah, we also praise God.

Jonah encountered God's salvation and so in verse 9 he wanted to offer his praise and sacrifices of thanksgiving. We have, if we have encountered the same God who is faithful, merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, we praise.

[26 : 55] We sing about it. we sing about Jesus who has died for us to protect us from the death that we deserve.

We sing Jesus who has for us to protect from the