

Salvation belongs to the Lord

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[0 : 00] And please turn your Bibles back to Jonah chapter 1 verse 17.! You can find it on page 925.

I remember clearly when I was eight, I was playing soccer at school.! I kicked the ball really hard and then it broke one of the lamps at school.

I ran away and hid. And then the teacher found out and then they said, if no one comes to take responsibility, I'm going to punish the whole class.

And so I went to the teacher and then I said, I did it. And then she said, go home and then tell your parents to pay a certain amount of money to replace the lamp.

So I went home. My mom wasn't there. So I was waiting very, very anxiously. Because I knew that I was going to get a smack on the bottom. I was waiting really anxiously and then I saw my mom coming in.

[1 : 22] And then I was trembling. I went to her and then I, before I could say anything, I broke in tears. And then I said, mom, I'm really sorry.

I did something naughty. I broke the lamp. I broke a lamp at school and now they're asking us to pay for it. And then my mom hugged me.

And she said, oh, Ricky, don't cry over that. I'm not going to punish you. Here, here's some money. And then she told me to say sorry to the teacher and give them the money.

I wonder if you've ever experienced that. When you were certain that judgment or punishment was coming and you knew that it would be fair and yet you received something else entirely.

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

[2 : 29] He endangered others. And 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 feel uncomfortable with that.

But this is justice. 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, is to separate oneself from the source of life. Death is the deserved natural and moral consequence of turning away from the giver of life.

Now, Jonah knew that. In chapter 1, verse 11 to 12, when the sailors asked what must be done to calm the storm, Jonah offered himself.

[3 : 34] 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.

And Jonah knew that. But then the story takes a turn that tells us something profound about the heart of God. 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. Now, some people might see Jonah's being swallowed by a fish as a punishment. I certainly did when I was a child.

[4 : 49] I used to hear the story like, oh, Jonah didn't listen to God, and so he was swallowed by a big fish. Even my youth pastor, when I felt God's calling into ministry, but I wanted to run away, my pastor said, be careful, if you run away, you're going to be eaten by a big fish.

In that version of the story, the fish is the punishment. You run away, you get eaten by a big fish. But that misunderstands the passage. The fish is not judgment. It's rescue. God saved Jonah from drowning. At the very edge of deserved death, he sent the fish to pick him up.

It's amazing if you think about it. God commanded Jonah, his prophet, to go to Nineveh, 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 rebelled. I'm sorry. Creation obeyed. Now, this tells us something about God's heart.

[6 : 20] The God of the Bible does not delight in death, even deserved death. As 2 Peter says, he does not want anyone to perish, but everyone to repent.

Running away from the source of life means death. That's the consequence. But God doesn't delight in that. God is not waiting to crush us.

He pursues us so we might return. The story shows this in the next verse. In chapter 2, verse 1, From inside the fish, Jonah prayed to the Lord his God.

Jonah had rebelled and run, but God was still the Lord his God. The covenant relationship had not been broken, even though Jonah ran away from him.

But God did not let go. So now Jonah prayed to God. Now, pause for a moment and think about this.

[7 : 33] If you were inside the belly of a fish, what would you pray for? Jonah had been saved from drowning, but he was still trapped.

I would pray to get out immediately. Three days and three nights is simply too long. Jonah didn't. Jonah prayed. He offered a psalm of praise.

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. You listened to my cry.

Jonah prayed, not like someone waiting to be saved, but like someone who had been saved. He 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 pick him up. So having encountered that grace, Jonah did not even ask for anything else.

[8 : 37] He praised. And in his praise, he recalled his experience in more detail. Verse 3.

Jonah was describing in detail what it felt like to be drowning.

He recited his experience back to God. But notice how he said, You hurled me into the depths. I have been banished from your sight. Actually, is that what happened? That God hurled him into the depths? Didn't he run away?

Wasn't that justice? Didn't he banish himself from God's sight by running away? 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 God rescued him.

[9 : 55] 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 care.

And that is what makes this a prayer of praise rather than a prayer of complaint. If judgment itself, which he deserved, is governed by the God who is merciful, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love, the Lord his 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 when I do that, they know that I'm giving the punishment as their father who loves them. Because any time they apologize and come in for a hug, I will always receive them back and hug them back.

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

[11 : 24] So how much more would he save the people that he loves if he cry out to him, even if they have rebelled against him, like Jonah? Like our New Testament reading in Romans 10 says, everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

Jonah experienced this firsthand. Even his judgment is in the hands of the merciful God who loves him. 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.

Jonah is assured of God's salvation. He is assured of God's salvation. Because the one bringing, letting him go into the deserved punishment is his God who loves him.

Jonah is our God. If our God is this faithful God who is merciful and slow to anger and does not delight in death, even deserved death, what do we do when we know we are in the depth?

[12:57] A friend of mine used to meet up with someone who didn't believe in Jesus to read the Bible for a few years. But after so long, this person still refused to accept Jesus, even after understanding the gospel, reading the Bible for a few years.

And so my friend asked, why? And they answered, because I think I'm still not good enough to turn to God. And then my friend asked, well, are you bad enough to need to be saved by God?

God does not save the people who think they are good enough to save themselves. God saves those who cry out to him in helplessness, 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?

[14:15] 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.

Verse 5, This is the lowest point imaginable.

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 expected finality. He deserved it. No escape, no return. But again, Jonah recalled the rescue.

You, Lord, my God, brought my life up from the pit. Someone was sharing his story with me, and he said that.

[15:42] He said, I was, my life was really bad. It was the proper consequences for my actions. But, when I thought I hit rock bottom, I found out that rock was Christ.

Now, from the perspective of ancient people, this would have been amazing. In the ancient world, gods had jurisdictions. Sea gods ruled the sea.

Mountain gods ruled the hills. The gods of death ruled the realm of the dead. But Jonah's God is amazing. In chapter 1, Jonah went down to Joppa, a city outside of Israel, and yet, 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. Not even death.

[16:55] 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.

Even from the depths outside of Israel, Jonah could turn towards God in the temple, and God would hear him.

There's no place on earth that God cannot reach. And so Jonah praised 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, Zeus.

[18:05] Not from the modern gods of money or success. Not from our obedience. Not from our knowledge. from the Lord.

Because he's the only one whose power and grace and mercy and love are so far-reaching and so faithful. And then, 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. We are alive.

And we will be alive because God saves. The people that have, the people that we love, that have physically died, are alive and will be alive because God saves.

And Jonah's prayer confronts us with a choice. If salvation truly belongs to the Lord, to the God of the Bible, then everything else we cling to for security is exposed for what it truly is, an idol that cannot save.

[19 : 28] Worthless, as Jonah says. We might cling to another deity for salvation, for meaning, for peace, for purpose. We might cling to ourselves.

We might cling to career or to reputation or to people's approval to give us meaning or purpose or peace or joy or salvation.

And when those things fail us, we feel as helpless as Jonah sinking beneath the waves. 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.

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

[20 : 36] 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?

Did his love and mercy simply overrule his justice? For us, that might sound good. For those people who have suffered injustices, that's not the God that they want to worship.

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

The Ninevites were horrible people who delighted in torture and conquest. So when God spared their lives later on in the story, what about justice?

[21 : 46] Jonah would not like that. Well, here is the same question. What about justice towards Jonah? Well, I think the answer is not that justice no longer matters to God.

It's that God had provided a way for his justice and mercy to meet. And we know this way. This is when Jesus answers 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 Aaron. Jonah nearly died, but he was not abandoned by God. God kept chasing him.

[22 : 55] Jesus truly died and was abandoned by God. He cried out, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? He was abandoned so we might not be.

Jonah's three days in the belly of the fish were for his own restoration, so he repented. Jesus' three days in the belly of the death were for our restoration through his destruction.

The God who rescued Jonah from deserved death is the same God who would later place that deserved punishment on himself in the person of Jesus.

That deserved death for both Jonah and us was put on himself in Jesus. Because Jesus was forsaken when he bore the sins of the world, everyone who turns to God for salvation like Jonah and like us will never be forsaken.

So Jonah's story is really our story. We might read this story and we're like, Jonah, what are you doing? Well, Jonah is a mirror for us.

[24 : 21] 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, rejecting his blessings as if there were something else that's 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.

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 along?

God? So what do we do in light of that? That we have encountered the same God? 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 from him.

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.

[25 : 50] Let's recite our saving experience back to God in our prayers and in our praises. And so like Jonah, we praise God.

Jonah encountered God's salvation. And so in verse 8 and 9, he wanted to offer his praise and sacrifices of thanksgiving.

If we have encountered the same God who is faithful, merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and if he has saved us, we praise, we sing about him.

we sing about the amazing grace that has come to us, undeserved, amazing grace, that we don't need to suffer the deserved death anymore.

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