



Speaker:
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Lord of Salvation

◀ Series: Jonah · 2 of 2

9/12/2021 (SUN) | Bible: **Jonah 2**

Last week, we began our study of the book of Jonah.

It's an unusual book among the minor prophets, because it's not a record of Jonah's prophecies but an account of an episode in his life.

We focused on how elements in the story spoke of God's greatness and his sovereignty over all his creation. Yet, as a whole, I proposed the book should be seen even more so as a declaration of God's grace abounding to even the worst of sinners.

You might remember I cautioned against having a judgemental spirit towards the actions of Jonah, remembering that any goodness or lack of rebellion in us was a consequence of God's grace and **not** because we're better behaved by nature.

But with that caution in the background, we were still able to clearly see Jonah's fault. Even when the story reached the point of his confession of faith during the storm, we were left wondering just how sincere he was. Every one of us, Jonah included, are prone to regurgitating Biblical truths we hold yet not living by them. We can even *grow* in our zeal for these truths while remaining dead in respect of letting those truths dictate how we live.

I have two main points for you today. Firstly, I'd like to look at Jonah's descent into that pit of trouble he got himself in; and secondly, I'd like us to see his deliverance by God. And all this is just another excuse for me to talk about the salvation found in Jesus.

His descent

At the very start of the story, we see Jonah in rebellion to God. He's been given a mission, and he runs away from it. We wondered, didn't we, what on earth he was thinking, running away from God! Inevitably, God pursued him. And we remember that God will pursue all those in rebellion against him. Thankfully for us, he pursued us in love and not in wrath. When he caught up with us, if you like, it was to halt us and reveal to us existence as it really is. And with this vision we saw how universal sin is, and we saw that Calvary was about *us*.

You remember last week I was prompted to focus on the greatness of God because of the frequency of the word "great" and its associated words. This time, I was led to consider Jonah's descent because of another aspect of the story.

"Going down". The term itself, and the thought behind it, keeps cropping up. What do I mean? Let's look again at the first chapter:

- In verse 3, it says he *went down* to Joppa
- In the same verse, he *went down* into the boat
- When he was on the boat—verse 5—he *went down* into the bowels of the ship to sleep
- And in verse 15, we see he was thrown into the sea and *went down* underwater.

He went down, down, down. And this imagery of a gradual descent should prompt us to think about how he had descended *inwardly*. We'll expand a bit on that later.

In chapter 2, and looking at verse 6, it sounds like Jonah reached the seabed. Mountains, of course, often have their bases under the sea. Whether he grew tired treading water and sank or he was pulled down by some underwater current, he was underwater long enough to believe the depths of the sea would become his Sheol, his grave.

Jonah's prayer, which takes up most of chapter 2, begins with a reference to the "belly of hell". You might assume the belly is that of the whale. But it sounds to me more like a reference to him being in the sea. He was about to drown. So the whale was God's means for saving him.

Don't be misled by this word *hell*. There are many believers who think when they see this word it must mean a place of eternal torment. This sort of teaching is coming from pulpits. Let me say again: "hell" in the King James Bible is a translation of several words. Generally speaking, the word when used by itself simply means death. It *can* refer to the place of punishment fitted out by God for all those who die unrepentant, although it's usually then accompanied by another word, as in "hell FIRE", for example.

More recent translations of the Bible don't use the word *hell* in verse two but use the original Hebrew word, which is *Sheol*. And this just means death. The ancients preferred to picture it as a *place* the dead went to, but it's more useful if you understand it is referring simply to the grave.

This emotive prayer of Jonah's was really wrenched out of him through these extreme circumstances. It's really a prayer about him being in trouble and God delivering him from it. It hasn't gone unnoticed by Bible students that Jonah avoids owning up to his sin in this prayer. He was certainly overwhelmed with thanksgiving and relief, but how full a repentance was is hard to see.

It's ironic that Jonah had done his utmost to get away from God, but when he feels he's really been abandoned by God, he's grieved by it and even says how much he looks forward to seeing God again!

Believers don't do so well being apart from God. You may not have run away from God like Jonah did, but you sort of do when you neglect to spend time with him. If, say, you allow the responsibilities of this world to prevent you from hearing God's word and praying to him, you may well as be getting on a plane to Mexico to escape him.

And any Christian who's been in that awful situation, where they've distanced themselves from God, will know what a miserable experience it is. On the one hand, they know the way

back to fellowship is through fervent prayer, but on the other hand they'll likely want to put off approaching God because they have a lot of explaining to do!

But Jonah did pray to God. And God delivered him from his troubles.

His deliverance

This prayer of Jonah's is relaying how he was crying out to God as he was about to drown. But the prayer itself was made from inside the belly of the big sea creature.

I can't think of a weirder place for someone to be praying from. But it should encourage us, as we realise God can hear us no matter where we are. No matter *how* we are. No matter *when* we are. And Jonah knew God had heard his cry for help² because God *sent* help.

In verse three, take note that Jonah talks about God throwing him in the sea. Wait a minute: wasn't it the sailors who threw him in? Of course it was. *But Jonah ascribes it to God.* We see the same thing in the life of Job. All these terrible things happened to him—and we see Satan was responsible for it all—and Job confesses *God* did it to him.

Probably the most common view in the church today is not what the Bible teaches. A wonderful Christian friend of mine was telling me recently how they'd nearly been in an accident on the motorway. As we talked about it, I mentioned something about God sending these things for a reason. My friend was shocked by this. They thought it impossible that a God of love would cause such bad things.

Friends, whenever our lives are impacted by disease or accident, we should acknowledge God's hand in it. And if you belong to God, you have the assurance what he's doing is for your benefit.

There's this cycling within Jonah's prayer. He'll talk about the trouble he was in but then move to something positive. Verse 3: *Out of the belly of Sheol I cried...but you heard my prayer.* Verse 4: *I am cast out of your sight...but I'll worship you in your temple again.* Verse 7: *My life was fainting away...but my prayer reached you.* It's quite poetic.

Even while the storm was raging up above, the large fish was in the vicinity. And as Jonah uttered his last prayer of desperation, seconds away from drowning, the fish's mouth was already open to swallow him.

It's mind blowing when you think of how God prepares answers to prayers well in advance of us praying. I'll go further and say the preparations for the answers to your prayers are being made even before any problem arises. Even now, God is organising deliverance for problems which haven't yet even entered your life. So much wisdom! So much love.

Whenever you hear Jonah's prayer, the style of it will sound very familiar to you. And of course this is partly because you've heard this read, or you've read it yourself, several times.

Part of the reason it sounds so familiar to us is it's a *scriptural* prayer. That is, the whole prayer is based on the Hebrew scriptures. I thought it'd be worth comparing what Jonah prayed with some quotes from the Psalms to show you what I mean:

<p>Psalm 120:1 In my distress I cried unto the Lord, and he heard me</p>	<p>Jonah 2:2 I cried by reason of mine affliction unto the Lord, and he heard me</p>
<p>Psalm 42:7 All thy waves and thy billows are gone over me.</p>	<p>Jonah 2:3 All thy billows and thy waves passed over me.</p>
<p>Psalm 31:22 For I said in my haste, <i>I am cut off from before thine eyes.</i></p>	<p>Jonah 2:4 Then I said, <i>I am cast out of thy sight.</i></p>
<p>Psalm 69:1–2 Save me, O God, for the waters are come in unto my soul. I sink in deep mire, where <i>there is no standing...</i></p>	<p>Jonah 2:5 The waters compassed me about, even to the soul. The depth closed me round about...</p>
<p>Psalm 142:3 When my spirit was overwhelmed within me, then thou knewest my path. Psalm 18:6 He heard my voice out of his temple, and my cry came before him, <i>even into his ears.</i></p>	<p>Jonah 2:7 When my soul fainted within me, I remembered the Lord. And my prayer came in unto thee, into thine holy temple.</p>
<p>Psalm 31:6 I have hated them that regard lying vanities...</p>	<p>Jonah 2:8 They that observe lying vanities forsake their own mercy.</p>
<p>Psalm 116:17 I will offer to thee the sacrifice of thanksgiving and will call upon the name of the Lord. Psalm 116:18 I will pay my vows unto the Lord... Psalm 3:8 Salvation belongeth unto the Lord.</p>	<p>Jonah 2:9 But I will sacrifice unto thee with the voice of thanksgiving. I will pay that that I have vowed. Salvation is of the Lord.</p>

In the most dangerous event of his life, Jonah drew on Scripture. Jesus did the same, as did the apostles. And many of God’s people down the centuries have continued the habit.

We pray about all kinds of stuff. And we put these prayers together based on our understanding of God and how he works.

Hopefully, all our prayers reflect Biblical truth. As an example, we ask God to deliver us from trouble because we know from the scriptures he *is* a God who delivers his people from trouble. But we make our strongest case to God when we use the scriptures themselves. When we quote the Bible in our prayers, we have that absolute confidence that what we’re saying is true. We can also use God’s own words to persuade him. After all, if he’s made a promise, we can hold him to it.

Jonah’s prayer isn’t a model one. We shouldn’t make our prayers like his. Jesus, however, did teach us how to pray, in what’s commonly known as “The Lord’s prayer”. I’d never

criticize praying this prayer of Jesus word for word, but we need to be mature about this. It was given as a *model* prayer. It gives us the main elements of a prayer: praise, acknowledgement of sins, proper requests, and so on. Jesus wanted us to identify those different aspects of prayer then use them as a basis for our own. He wants us to pray from the heart, not just quote a prayer from memory every week.

Now Jonah's prayer *isn't* a model, but it's taught us it's good to include Bible references in our prayers. And as we listen to Jonah tell us how God heard him, it encourages us in our own prayers. God heard his voice. God gave him an assurance he would live to worship another day. God saved his life.

A God of salvation

Think for a moment about the descent not just of Jonah, but of mankind in general. The first man, Adam, **descended** into disobedience. God sentenced Adam with a curse. Difficulties were introduced into his life, and his body would begin a slow process of deterioration which would end up in his death.

But God decreed Adam's family would share in his curse. And by Adam's family, I mean all his descendants—the human race. And to show just how proper it was for God to extend this curse to us, we sin wilfully. We come into this world sinning extravagantly. We've shown by our behaviour that we identify with our father, Adam.

Sin came into the world, and sin brought death. Man, by nature, is dead spiritually, and he'll get to taste physical death too.

But once again God was already working on a solution. The development of his great antidote to sin began even before sin came into the world.

His solution was at the same time brilliant, costly, loving and bloody. He'd come into the world in human form and somehow sacrifice himself to save others. God would appear in the flesh in the form of the man Jesus and be killed. And in all this, God's nature would not be compromised.

You can see I'm presenting Jonah as a type of the sinner. He pictures for us man **descending** into sin but being **delivered** by God.

But we also see in Jonah a type of Jesus Christ himself:

- The tempest Jonah found himself at the centre of is like the violent storm of God's anger towards sin and sinners
- Jonah understands he has to die so that others might live
- He delivers himself into the hands of the heathen
- He's fully prepared to die to save them
- In his near-death experience, he considers himself to already be in the grave
- And by God's power and mercy, he is "raised from the dead".

So it was Jesus placed himself in the hands of the heathen to be killed by them. And the incredible irony was his self-sacrifice would be the means by which millions of the heathen would come to have their sins forgiven and receive eternal life.

Salvation, Jonah confesses, is of the Lord. SALVATION IS OF GOD.

- He *invented* it before the world was formed
- He *secured* it in the provision of a saviour, Jesus the Christ
- And he *applies* it to his elect people by the Holy Spirit

The Messiah of the Hebrews became the Saviour of the whole world! And it was in HIS descent to this earth and HIS descent to the grave he was a suitable replacement for us. When a person throws himself to the mercy of God, they discover they've in a way descended with Christ to his grave. They come to see they, in some equally mysterious sense, rose with him from the dead.

The world as we know it today are the heathen of the Bible. Before our conversion, we were the modern-day sailors, the modern day Ninevites. The message which came to us is what we now pass on to them. SALVATION COMES FROM GOD ALONE. And we promise them that if they pray for salvation, God **will** give it.

They then experience what Jonah did and what is the possession of all of us today who walk in his ways: a joyful mixture of God's love, kindness, faithfulness and grace.

And even after *they've* repented, and *they've* prayed, and *they've* trusted, and *they* continue with God THEIR WHOLE LIVES, they come to see more and more clearly how their holy attitudes and actions *were themselves* from God. **He gets ALL the glory.**

When I see Jonah, I'll tell him he was right about this: salvation is all of God.

Amen.