

Salvation is God's Business

Jonah 1:17-2:10

- I. We will be disciplined when we sin. 1: 17**
1. God prepares our discipline.
 2. God is precise with our discipline.
- II. We should be distressed when we sin. 2: 1-6**
1. Cry out and god will hear. 2:1-2
 2. Count the cost and god will help. 2:3-6
- III. We can be delivered when we sin. 2:6-10**
1. Deliverance from sin is a spiritual matter 2:6-9
 - a. We must remember the lord is our Savior. 2:6-8
 - b. We must honor the lord with our Service. 2:9
 2. Deliverance from sin is a physical matter. 2:10

Salvation is God's Business

Jonah 1:17-2:10

Introduction

- I came across a poem that is related to an important character in the Bible. The title of the poem is “Who Am I?” Listen to the words and see if you can identify this famous and colorful character in the Bible.

Adam, God made out of dust,
 But thought it best to make me first,
 So I was made before man,
 To answer God’s most holy plan,
 A living being I became,
 And Adam gave to me my name.

I from his presence then withdrew,
 And more of Adam never knew.
 I did my maker’s law obey,
 Nor ever went from it astray.
 Thousands of miles I go in fear
 But seldom on earth do I appear.

For purpose wise which God did see,
 He put a living soul in me.
 A soul from me God did claim
 And took from me the soul again.
 So when from me the soul had fled,
 I was the same as when first made.

And without hands, or feet, or soul,
 I travel on from pole to pole.
 I labor hard by day by night,
 To fallen man I give great light.
 Thousands of people, young and old,
 Will by my death great light behold.

No right or wrong can I conceive,
 The Scripture I cannot believe.
 Although my name therein is found,
 They are to me an empty sound.
 No feat of death doth trouble me,

Real happiness I'll never see.

To heaven I shall never go,
 Or even on to Hell below.
 Now when these lines you slowly read,
 Go search your Bible with all speed.
 For that my name is written there,
 I do honestly to you declare.

Who am I? Why, this is a reference to the great fish that swallowed Jonah.

- When a man catches a fish, that's not a big deal. But when a fish catches a man, now that's a big story. However, though that may be a big story, it is certainly not the best story.
- The best story is not a fish catching a man. The best story is God saving man.
- Jonah chapter 2 is a story about God's business: The business of salvation. This is a story that has caused skeptics to sneer but it has blessed believers now for over 2700 years. I heard the story of a preacher who had brought a message on Jonah. Following the message, a critic came up and asked, "How do you know it was a whale that swallowed Jonah?" The Preacher responded, "I don't, but when I get to Heaven, I'll ask him." The critic, with a sense of cynicism responded, "Well, what if Jonah isn't in Heaven?" The preacher then responded, "Well then, you can ask him."
- Could Jonah have been swallowed by a great fish and survived? I believe the answer to that question is a resounding, "Yes!" First of all, Matthew 12:40-41 teaches us that Jesus believed it, and that settles it for me. Secondly, Luke 1:37 tells us, "With God, all things are possible." Our god is a miracle-working God and therefore miracles are both possible and yes, probable.
- You see, our belief in the historical nature of Jonah's experience does not rest upon scientific observation, but upon theological conviction. Is there a God? What is this God

like? Has this God revealed himself? Does the revelation of this God indicate He is all-powerful, and therefore, capable of miracles? To those who have embraced the truth of the Bible and met the God of the Bible, those of us who have experienced the resurrection power of the Son of God, that God could appoint a fish to swallow Jonah is not a problem at all. God is a God of salvation. He is in the saving business. He has saved us from our sins and in this account we find him saving Jonah from the sea. Three wonderful truths stand out in this passage as we consider our relationship to the God who is in the business of saving people.

I. We will be disciplined when we sin.

1:17

- Now the Lord had prepared a great fish to swallow Jonah and Jonah was in the belly of the fish 3 days and 3 nights. This fish was supernaturally prepared, the word means “ordained, appointed by God.” It is often a misconception that the fish was sent to punish Jonah. However, if one reads the text closely, one discovers the fish was sent actually for Jonah’s salvation! Jonah was in danger of drowning, and so God sent His yellow-finned cab to rescue His rebellious prophet and save him from a watery grave. Indeed, the prayer in chapter 2 reveals Jonah’s gratitude for the provision of the great fish and his rescue from drowning. God disciplines us when we sin. Hebrews 12:5, which is a quote from Proverbs 3:11-12, says, “My son, do not despise the discipline of the Lord, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him, for whom the Lord loves, he disciplines and He scourges every son whom he receives.” The text goes on to say in verse 8, “But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons.” Our text reveals 2 things about the reality of God's discipline when we sin.

1. God prepares our discipline.

- Jonah 1:14-16 reveals that God working through the mariners, the sailors, prepared Jonah's discipline. 1:14 says, "For you O Lord have done as it pleased you." Though the sailors were the instrument, God was the author of Jonah's discipline. God prepared precisely what He would do to His rebellious prophet. The discipline was that he was to be thrown into the sea. He would truly have a "near death experience." God is a good heavenly Father. He will discipline His children; not out of spite, but out of love. As He prepares the way for our salvation, He likewise prepares the way for our restoration when we sin. God prepares our discipline.

2. God is precise with our discipline.

- It was God who would determine that Jonah would be cast into the sea. It was God who would determine that Jonah would spend 3 days and 3 nights (Hebraism for any part of a whole; not necessarily 72 hours) in the belly of the fish. It was God who would determine that Jonah would have a near death experience. God prepares our discipline and God is precise in our discipline.
- **Application.** As a good father God wishes to be gentle in His discipline. If He can speak the Word and we respond, that's what He will do. However, if it is necessary for Him to use more severe measures, then God will do that because God is committed to His children.
- **Illustration.** My joy at sitting with my grandmother Akin when I was a little boy in the Benhill Baptist Church in Atlanta, Georgia and the measures that she would use to discipline me when I would misbehave. She would first pat me on the leg. She would

then squeeze me on the arm. And then she would use the “Live in Atlanta” WWF nerve hold by my neck to get my attention and to let me know of her displeasure with my behavior.

- **Application.** God functions in a similar way. He will tap us on the leg. He will speak the Word. He will tap us on the leg and put His arm around us, but if necessary He will use that very instructive nerve hold and yes, if necessary, even put us flat on our backs in the belly of a great fish in order to get our attention. God will discipline us when we sin. He prepares our discipline. He is precise in our discipline.

II. **We should be distressed when we sin.**

2:1-6

- Chapter 2 contains a prayer of thanksgiving from Jonah. This is a significant turning point in the book. Although Jonah had been encouraged to pray earlier by the pagan captain, this is the first time we actually see Jonah addressing his God. It is significant to note that in verse 1 the Bible says, “Jonah prayed to the Lord, his God.” Literally, he prayed to “Yahweh, (Jehovah) his Elohim.”
- The actual prayer is in verses 2-9. The prayer itself is filled with the nuances and language of the Psalms. His was not a head problem; his was a heart problem. Jonah knew the Word of God, and at this time when he is experiencing distress over his sin, his heart and his mind are led again to the instruction of the Lord. Sin in the life of the believer should be a distressing matter. It should grieve us that we have offended our holy God. It should break our hearts. For our sin ultimately was that which nailed the Lord Jesus to Calvary's cross. When we see our sin as God sees it, what is it that we can do in response?

1. **Cry out and God will hear.** 2:1-2

- This is an extremely personal prayer 25 personal pronouns appear in verses 2-9. Twice in verse 2, the Bible says Jonah cried out to the Lord. He cried because of his affliction, his distress. And God answered. He cried from the belly of Sheol and God heard. “Sheol” is a word that is used in a number of ways in the Old Testament. Its most basic meaning is the place of the dead. Amos 9:2 speaks of it being located under the earth. Psalm 88:3 and Isaiah 38:18 speak of it as a place separated from God. Psalm 139:8 points out that God has access to this place. Often in the Old Testament, it is a reference to the grave (Psalm 18:6; Psalm 33; Psalm 49:14; Isaiah 28:15). Here the imagery is of Jonah being at the very brink of death. To cry from the belly of Sheol meant to cry from death, from Hell, from the grave. His life was spent. He was at an end. Yet he cried and God answered and God heard. 1 John 1:9 says “If we confess our sin, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sin and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” When we cry out concerning our sin, the Bible teaches us that our God is a gracious God, He will hear.

2. Count the costs and God will help. 2:3-6

- In these verses, Jonah speaks of the utter helplessness of his condition because of his sin. He has been cast into the deep, into the heart of the seas. The floods have surrounded him, the waves pass over him. Verse 4 – He had been cast out of the very sight of God. Verse 5 – The waters surrounded him even to his soul. Weeds wrapped around his head.
- He went down to very foundations of the mountains with the earth and its bars closing behind him forever. His life was the pits and in the pits! Verse 6 –

Jonah had been entombed by the sea. He was about to step into the underworld from which he would never escape. Down, down, down went God's rebellious prophet—down to Joppa, the ship, and now the sea—sinking helplessly and hopelessly out of God's sight.

- Sin exacts a heavy toll. Sin is a cruel task master. We may play for a time, but we can be assured that we will pay for our sin. Galatians teaches us, “Do not be deceived, God is not mocked. For whatever a man sows, that he will also reap.” Verse 8 continues, “For He who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life.” It is interesting to note that in verse 4 Jonah says that he had been out of God's sight. That was what he thought he wanted according to Jonah 1:3. Yet now that he experienced the absence of God, he found it to be more than he could bear.
- As Jonah contemplated the cost of his sin, he again discovered the marvelous grace of God. In verse 4, he points out that he would look again toward the holy temple, the place of God's presence. In verse 6, he notes that it is God who brought his life up out of the pit; Jehovah, his God. When Jonah counted the cost of his sin, he discovered indeed the merciful hand of God. God helps those who turn from their sin. God helps those who acknowledge their sin. God had to lay him out, put him on his back, so to speak, to get his attention. But once Jonah looked to God, he discovered that God was looking at him. We should be distressed when we sin. Cry out and God will hear. Count the costs and God will help.

III. We can be delivered when we sin. 2:6-10

- Why was Jonah swallowed by the great fish? I believe there are at least 4 reasons: 1) Salvation from drowning; 2) Transportation to Nineveh; 2) Education from God; and 4) Re-commission from God. When Jonah confessed his sin, God provided cleansing. He delivered His prophet and proved Himself to be the God of the second chance.

1. Deliverance from sin is a spiritual matter. 2:6-9

- The God whom Jonah thought had banished him reached down and pulled him out of the death and despair of the Mediterranean Sea, showing Jonah that he was still his God. It is accurate to call Jonah the “Old Testament prodigal.” Yet, like the prodigal son of the New Testament, when he came to his senses, he returned to his Father and found his Father waiting for him.

A. We must remember the Lord is our Savior. 2:6-8

- These verses have an uplifting tone as they focus on the salvation of the Lord. Verse 6 – “You have brought up my life from the pit.” Verse 7 – “When my soul fainted within me, I remembered you. My prayer went to you.” Jonah has been in the belly of the great fish for some time now. He is now aware of the fact that he will not die. God is the God of the second chance. With prayer and thanksgiving, he looks to God and remembers his Lord. In verse 8, he draws a contrast with the living God and false gods. He points out that the gods of this world are nothing more than worthless idols, and that those who put their trust in them forsake the only true means of mercy.

- It may look good for a time. They may even promise satisfaction and pleasure. But eventually, they prove to be worthless and without mercy. “It is the fool who puts his trust in the empty nothings,” Jonah would say. They abandon the mercy, the loving-kindness (Hebrew, *hesed*) of the Lord.

B. We must honor the Lord with our service. 2:9

- Genuine repentance will always usher in action. In verse 9, Jonah speaks in words that are quite reminiscent of the pagan seamen in chapter 1 as they celebrated their deliverance from the raging sea. Two promises are made by Jonah to his God. 1) He will sacrifice with the voice of thanksgiving. 2) He will pay what he has vowed. One cannot just simply bask in the salvation which God provides. One must respond to His grace. The last phrase in verse 9 is probably the key verse in the book. Indeed, it is probably the key verse in the Bible: “Salvation is of the Lord.” Salvation belongs to God. It does not belong to any other. It does not come from any other source. The Lord is in charge of salvation. Salvation is His arena of authority.
- Jonah has come to understand that it is not his business who the Lord will or will not save. Salvation is Jehovah’s to offer. He offered it to the sailors. He has now offered it to Jonah. He will also be free to offer it to Nineveh. Jonah finally recognized that he deserved death, not deliverance. He came to understand, as we must, that no one deserves salvation. It is an act of mercy by a loving and gracious God. Psalm

119:67 says, “Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep your word.”

2. Deliverance from sin is a physical matter. 2:10

- In the story of Jonah and the great fish, it is not Jonah that we should pity, it is the great fish. For 3 days and 3 nights, he had had an upset stomach. For 3 days and 3 nights, he had been nauseated by the rebellious prophet of the Lord. Finally, God granted him relief. The Bible says, “He vomited Jonah onto dry ground.” While some versions, in a more tame fashion, translate the word “vomited” by “spit” or “spewed,” the word does mean “to vomit.” While Jonah had been thinking and praying the fish had been swimming. We cannot be certain, but it may be that Jonah was some 3 days out to sea when he was cast into the Mediterranean.
- In all likelihood, Jonah was vomited back in Palestine, the place from whence he had fled. In other words, God brought him back to where he started. The dry land was now a place of safety. It was also a place of stability. But most importantly, it was the place of service. We can be delivered when we sin. Salvation and deliverance is indeed a Spiritual matter, but it is also a physical matter. As God cleanses our hearts, He prepares our hands and our feet for service unto Him. God does not save us simply to take us to heaven when we die. But God saves us for faithful service and obedience.

Conclusion

- Jonah discovered that salvation is God’s business. However, he discovered it the hard way. “Delivered from drowning, he found himself in the pitch black dark of the belly of the great

fish. Gastric juices washed over him, burning his skin, eyes, throat and nostrils. Oxygen, though present, was scarce. And each frantic gulp saturated his throat and lungs with salt water. The rancid smell of digested food was all about him, perhaps causing him to throw up repeatedly until only dry heaves were left. Everything he touched had the slimy feel of the mucous membrane that lined the stomach of the fish. Certainly, he felt claustrophobic. With each turn and dive of the great fish, he slipped and slid into the cesspool of the digestive fluids. No foot holds, no blankets, nothing but the cold, clammy depths of the sea monster's stomach for 3 days and 3 nights."

- God does deliver us from our sin but God also disciplines us when we sin. His discipline can be extremely uncomfortable. Indeed His discipline, if necessary, can break us. Jonah experienced God's grace. He experienced that grace in a way that he never expected. Is it possible that today God has you in some dark, slippery, distasteful place of discipline? Is it possible that you today are experiencing the harsher lashes of His grace? If Jonah chapter 2 teaches us anything, it teaches us that salvation is God's business and that in the life of the believer, God will discipline us when we sin and God will deliver us when we sin if we call on His name. Jonah discovered, as we can discover, that we can pray anytime, anywhere and be certain that no matter how suffocating and severe is the discipline of our God, our prayers will be heard and they will be answered by the God whose business is salvation. If you need to be delivered today from your sin, rest assured there is a God who is in the salvation business. If you call, He will answer. If you look, He will save.