

Salvation Belongs to the Lord

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 03 November 2024

Preacher: Simon Rehberg

[0 : 00] All right, let's read together from the Old Testament book of Jonah. Chapter one, verses 17 to chapter two, verse 10. So there are Bibles at the back.

If you at any time would like to have a hard copy of a Bible, feel free to get one. It's no problem to get up and grab one if you'd like to.

All right, Jonah chapter one starting in verse 17. This is God's holy word. And the Lord appointed a great fish to swallow up Jonah.

And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights. Then Jonah prayed to the Lord, his God from the belly of the fish, saying, I called out to the Lord out of my distress and he answered me.

Out of the belly of Sheol, I cried and you heard my voice for you cast me into the deep into the heart of the seas and the flood surrounded me.

[1 : 04] All your waves and your billows passed over me. Then I said, I am driven away from your sight. Yet I shall again look upon your holy temple. The waters closed in over me to take my life.

The deep surrounded me. Weeds were wrapped about my head at the roots of the mountains. I went down to the land whose bars closed upon me forever.

Yet you brought up my life from the pit. Oh Lord my God, when my life was fainting away, I remembered the Lord and my prayer came to you into your holy temple.

Those who pay regard to vain idols forsake their hope of steadfast love. But I with the voice of Thanksgiving will sacrifice to you. What I vowed I will pay.

Salvation belongs to the Lord. And the Lord spoke to the fish and it vomited Jonah out upon the dry land.

[2 : 02] It's so good to be with you again. We're still in Jonah. This is the third of six sermons almost half time, which is great for you. Maybe I don't know.

Let me tell you something about ancient Middle Eastern literature. I'm sure you're interested in that. In ancient Middle Eastern literature, shipwrecking stories like the one we read about last week in Jonah 1 had their own genre.

Shipwrecking stories. That's why a lot of people believe that Jonah is just a made up story. But I was wondering if that actually makes sense because there's not a single story out there in the literature that ends like this one.

There's not one story where the protagonist is thrown overboard to save people and then swallowed up by a fish. Do you think this is made up? What's the point of the fish?

What's the point of having a fish in this story? Jonah chapter two is giving us an answer. The point of the fish is grace. It's all about grace.

[3 : 03] It's about God showing Jonah how endlessly deep and wide and big his grace is. All of this needed to happen for Jonah to see that, to experience that.

It gives him time to recognize what grace and salvation mean and to understand that he's utterly hopeless. He's in the belly of a fish and there's nothing he can do about it.

And then something interesting happens. Jonah prays a prayer, a prayer of faith. And that's what this chapter is about. It's showing us what faith, what true faith looks like.

There are three things that Jonah's prayer about faith is teaching us and I would like to talk about them tonight. So the first thing is that faith cries out to God.

Secondly, faith remembers in the hardest of times. Thirdly, faith looks at the temple. So firstly, faith cries out to the Lord.

[4 : 04] Last week we said that Jonah went down, down, down to Joppa, down into the boat, down into the inner part of the boat. And now he goes even further down to the bottom of the sea, to the

heart of the sea.

And we talked about how the sea is a symbol in the Old Testament for chaos, for death, for sin. And he's just descending down there and it symbolizes Jonah going down into death, into the realms of death.

And I don't know, some of you here might know what that feels like. Some of you here might know what it feels like to hit rock bottom. There's nothing left to do where you're utterly hopeless, helpless, powerless.

You can't do anything about your situation. Nothing helps against getting that diagnosis. Nothing helps against that rough breakup that you're going through. Nothing helps when a loved person dies.

But Jonah is reminding us here, there's one thing that you can always do, no matter where you are, no matter how bad the situation is, even if you're in the belly of a fish.

[5 : 10] And that is praying, crying out to God. You can do that always and anywhere. So true faith will cry out to God. True faith will admit that you cannot help yourself.

If we look at the text, then we read sentences like this. I called out to the Lord. I cried. You heard my voice. My prayer came to you with the voice of thanksgiving.

You see? Jonah cries out. He prays. He calls upon the name of the Lord. You see, often we speak of faith as if it's something passive, as if there's nothing we can control about having faith.

And in our confession of faith, we do read that faith is a receiving and a resting upon God's promises. And that's very true. But it's not like faith is something that you have no control over whatsoever.

It's not like faith is like a thermostat that, you know, when the temperature drops too low, the thermostat switches on and then it brings everything up again, brings the temperature up again.

[6 : 18] Faith is not like that. Think about faith more like a plant, something you have to water, something you have to feed, to nurture. And then it grows and the roots go deep into the ground.

And when bad times come, you're solid. There is a tree that will withstand the winds of life, the storms of the sea, the storms of whatever life is throwing at you.

So faith is not passive. Faith is something we also have to proactively care for and feed. And crying out to God is the first step you can do.

Crying out to God is the most basic thing anyone here can do. It's the most basic thing we have to do in order to have faith. For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved, says the Bible in Romans.

You know, often people see faith as a talent or a skill. It's like, oh, that person is good at playing an instrument. That person is really good at painting a picture.

[7 : 17] I can never do that. We sometimes think about faith like that. Oh, I can't have faith. I'm just too pessimistic or I doubt things too much.

But that is not true. I don't believe that. I think everyone has the ability to have faith. Why? Because I see that all around me. Every day I see it in my own life.

I see it in other people's life. How? Well, you have faith in your parents, your partner, your children.

You have faith in medicine, in the government, in the laws of gravity.

You don't expect that your chair will float away in the next minute. Do you? Okay. Maybe you say physics, that something can empirically show it's something we can prove.

Okay, what about the love of your husband or your wife, the love of your parents? Can you empirically prove that? Is that something that can be shown with data?

[8 : 16] No, it's trust. You place your faith in that. In other words, I think faith is something which shows the absence of doubt.

Let's talk about faith as the absence of doubt, which brings us to the question of, where do we direct our doubts to? And that's interesting because a lot of people will doubt everything, especially Christianity, and there's cynical about it, and they will doubt everything about it, but what they will not do is they will never doubt their own doubts.

How do you know you doubt the right thing? Have you ever thought about that? Doubt your own doubts. Doubt your own cynicism, your sarcasm. The first step to finding faith is doubting yourself enough to go and explore and seek God.

That's what the Bible says over and over again. If you seek Him, that's God, if you seek God, He will be found by you. Whoever would draw near to God must believe that He exists and that He

rewards those who seek Him.

God says, you will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. Doubt your doubts. Some of the most brilliant minds on this earth have said that Christianity is true.

[9 : 38] They've said the claims of the gospel must be true. Albert Einstein, the more he knew about physics, the more he believed in God. And many others, Galileo, Isaac Newton, a lot of really, really brilliant minds.

You have to want to believe and the first step that you can do that is to cry out to God, to doubt your doubts, to simply start asking questions with the right posture in your heart.

You see, if you have a problem with someone, you can talk a lot about them, but if you don't talk to them, the problems won't go away. So if you have a problem with God, go, speak to God.

And also in this, there's an application for those who do believe. When we cry out, like Jonah, do we mean what we say? Do we mean it?

Are we crying out to God as if our life depends on it? Or are we simply complaining in God's direction? Because God is alive.

[10 : 48] God hears your prayers. He's real. Be honest with God. Doubt your doubts. I believe that Jonah does this here. Jonah, he has a development throughout this chapter, throughout the prayer, where he arrives at a statement at the very end, where he talks about grace.

He says, salvation belongs to the Lord. And some have said that this really is a statement that sums up everything in the Bible.

It's the heart of the Bible. God is something that belongs to God. We can't earn it. We can't, we don't deserve it. God doesn't owe us anything.

We can't get out of the belly of the fish on our own terms. Only God can make that happen. And that's especially important for the times we live in.

There was a famous philosopher called Philipp Reeff. He died in 2006, I believe. And in 1966, so quite a while ago, he wrote a book that is called The Triumph of the Therapeutic.

[11 : 55] And one of the things he observes in this book about society in the Western world is that we try to fix our own problems. We think about ourselves as a bit like machines, really.

There's something wrong with us. There's an error. We try to fix ourselves. I can fix myself. So we go and we go to therapy and we think that will truly heal us, that will truly fix us.

That is what we need. We need to be true to ourselves. And yes, we do. We do need to be true to ourselves. That's true. Therapy is great. Counseling, super important. But if you can't say that salvation belongs to the Lord, then maybe you haven't realized yet that you are sitting in the belly of the fish.

Maybe you haven't realized that things are worse than you might think. The triumph of the therapeutic. We can't fix ourselves. If you think that, then maybe this chapter here in Jonah, this second chapter in the story of Jonah is speaking to you because he is going through this change. He is acknowledging that he's fully dependent on God's grace. It's a gift. That's what grace means. You don't like it. Why?

[13 : 11] Because it's too good to be true, isn't it? Sometimes I think God's grace is too good to be true. I think there are about three categories of people, perhaps, maybe more.

But in this regard, let's say there are three groups of people. I think one group, they realize that they sit in the belly of the fish as it were and they can't get out by their own strength.

And therefore, they don't even want to be saved. I've had good friends in Germany that I talked to and they told me, you know, Simon, that's all good that you believe in Jesus and all that.

But I don't need to be saved. I don't want to be saved. I think I'm just trying my best here and that's about everything I can do. And then there are some people, they know that they sit in the belly of the fish, but they don't want grace.

They don't want a gift. They want to earn it. They want to do good works. They want to say, God, I've earned your grace. I don't accept it as a gift.

[14 : 17] And it's a bit like if someone came to you and said, here, I'll gift you this really expensive yacht, a boat, 30 million dollars, all right?

Pounds, 30 million pounds. Let's say 30 million pounds. And these kind of people, they would say, oh, thank you, that's great, but there must be something I can do about this.

And they look on their bank account and they see there are 300 quid, maybe, or you know what my bank account looks like. And they say, have my 300 quid. And just to, they do that to feel better

about themselves.

But what is actually happening? Does that make sense? It doesn't because the person giving you the yacht, they just wanted you to enjoy it. They're insulted if you give them 300 pounds and the yacht costs 30 million, right?

And then there's a third group of people, and that's people who think that God owes them something, that God has to save them out of the belly of the fish.

[15:21] True faith does neither of these things. True faith cries out for help and says salvation belongs to the Lord.

Secondly, faith remembers. Faith remembers in the hardest of times. Jonah is making reference in every single verse to how far away he is from God, how deep, how life-threatening his situation is. For example, out of my distress, out of the belly of Sheol, in the deep, in the heart of seas, I'm driven away from your sight, the waters closed in on me, and so on and so on.

My life was fainting away. Jonah acknowledges that things are not good right now, like in the previous chapter when the storm came.

But this time, Jonah's reaction is completely different. In the first chapter, we have the Mariners, and they turn to God and they pray, and they obey God. And Jonah is the one who's not really pious at all.

[16:20] But here, it seems like Jonah has learned his lesson. He reacts differently this time. He turns to prayer, and as we said, he cries out to God. But you can only do that if you are willing to remember, to remember your faith, to remember God, the promises he has given you, the love he has for you, the scriptures.

What is God saying in the scriptures? It's about remembering. If you look at the passage, the whole chapter, you'll realize it sounds very similar to a psalm.

If you read the Psalms, then you will find Psalms that sound very similar to Jonah's prayer. More specifically, it sounds like a Thanksgiving Psalm. And usually, you get these elements.

You get an intro, then a situation of crisis. Jonah's in the belly. Then he cries out for help. He asks for deliverance, and then he vows to sacrifice and praises God.

So what is happening here is that Jonah, it's almost like he remembers the scriptures. He remembers the Psalms, and he is singing a best of psalm medley in the middle of the ocean in the belly of the fish.

[17:32] If he was a free church of Scotland member, maybe he would have sang Psalm 16 and Psalm 100, who knows. But he's sitting there, and he remembers what he has read as a prophet.

He remembers the word of God. And the way that this chapter is built and constructed is that it is written in a very poetic way.

So the way that Hebrew poetry works here is that in one line, Jonah states how far gone he was, and then in the next line, how God has hurt him.

So we get these contrasts in this prayer. For example, I called out to the Lord out of my distress, and he answered me, I'm driven away from your sight, yet I shall look again upon your holy temple. I went down to the land, yet you brought up my life from the pit. When my life was fading away, I remembered the Lord. There's power in remembering the Lord.

[18:33] Remembering the Lord, what does remembering mean? The biblical meaning of remembering is not something that simply means remembering because you've forgotten something.

It means something more proactive. It means calling something to mind. It means studying, meditating, pondering over the word of God.

Even God sometimes remembers his people, but it's obviously not because God forgets things. God doesn't forget things. It is because he's bringing up to the mind of the people the covenant promises of the Old Testament.

Jonah is doing something similar here. He's remembering the promises. He's remembering the goodness of God in his situation of despair.

In other words, Jonah is preaching to himself down there in the belly of the fish. Are you a preacher? The passage is teaching us we have to all become preachers.

[19:39] And if we're not in the pulpit, then at least to ourselves. You have to become a preacher to yourself. What I mean by that. If you're in a difficult situation, then it's going to be really, really helpful if you can preach the gospel to your own heart.

If you can remember the goodness of God, if you can apply the scriptures to your own heart, if you're in situations of frustration, sadness, temptations, depression, you need to have the word of God hidden in your heart.

You need to have it stored up in your mind so you can call upon it, so you can use it, so you can call to your mind the promises that God is giving you in his word. And that of course assumes that, well, you know the word of God.

It assumes that you know God and his character. It assumes that you do spend time in the Bible, that you do spend time in prayer. So maybe that's something you want to start doing again.

You want to start a Bible reading plan, setting aside special time for prayer in your day-to-day routine, or maybe you want to memorize verses, talking to God, praying like Jonah here.

[20 : 53] You want to remind yourself as well how often God has been faithful and for how long God has been faithful in your life. So maybe you lead a prayer journal and you reflect upon one year ago, two, three, five, ten years ago, how far has God brought you?

How faithful has he been? How much in your life has changed? Faith remembers. Thirdly, faith looks at the temple.

In this prayer in Jonah chapter two, Jonah mentions the temple in his prayer twice in verses four and in verse seven.

Remember where Jonah is right now. Jonah is in the belly of Sheol. Sheol we said last week is a bit of a difficult concept to grasp, but just imagine it as the realms of death.

Jonah is at the low point and the lowest place possible. So what does he feel in that situation?

Maybe he feels like God, can you even hear me?

[22 : 06] Are you even here? He is so far away from his country. He's so far away from Jerusalem, from the temple, where God dwells.

And yet he says, yet I shall again look upon your holy temple. What does the temple symbolize?

The temple is where God dwells. The temple is where you go to worship, where you go and sacrifice. Longing for the temple in this case is too long for the presence of God.

In the first chapter of Jonah, it says twice that Jonah ran away from the presence of the Lord. Now he says he will look again upon the temple. He's longing for the temple.

To move from Sheol, from the belly of the fish to the temple is, in other words, to move from death to life. To long to gaze upon the temple is to long for life itself.

[23 : 12] Jonah looks at the temple as a place of faith and hope. What else is in the temple? The holiest of holies. In the Jewish temple, you have this place called the holiest of holies.

And it's the innermost sanctuary, which is located at the western of the temple. And it's this windowless room where the Ark of the Covenant was kept, which the Ark of the Covenant, if you remember the Old Testament, carries the Ten Commandments.

And it symbolizes Israel's covenant relationship with God. And only the Israelite High Priest would be allowed to go in there once a year on Yom Kippur, on the day of atonement.

And on that day, the High Priest would burn incense and he would sprinkle blood of a sacrificial animal to atone for his sins and the sins of the people of Israel.

You see, on the Ark of the Covenant, which I said, it keeps the law of God. There's something on it that's called the mercy seat.

[24 : 15] And that's where the blood was sprinkled onto. And the blood was supposed to atone the sins of the people of Israel. But we read in the New Testament that actually no sacrifice, nothing could ever atone for the sin of the people.

That's why Jesus had to come. That's why the Son of God had to become human. You learned earlier in the kid's talk and suffer and be killed to atone for our sins.

You see, the reason why Jonah can look at the temple in faith and hope is because Jesus came down from heaven and he became the atoning sacrifice.

And he made the cross, the new mercy seat, sprinkled with his blood, fulfilling the law of God that we could never fulfill. So that you and I, Jonah, may be pardoned.

There's one significant detail that I have mentioned, and it's in the very first verse of a reading. And it says that Jonah was in the belly of the fish for three days and three nights.

[25 : 20] In the New Testament, Jesus says something about this. He says, for his 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.

You see the story of Jonah, Jonah in the belly of the fish. It's a metaphor for Jesus's death and resurrection. It's a metaphor for when Jesus obediently and willingly went down to the bottom of the pit, to death, to the realm of death, and brought back victory over death.

To make it possible for you to live again, to run back to God again. We talked about Jonah running away from God, God pursuing Jonah, and now Jonah is coming back to God in faith.

Jesus made it possible for you to find faith, to cry out to God. So remember this, and remember to look at the temple.

Remember to look at the mercy seat where Jesus' blood was sprinkled so that you could live and come back to the Father. Let us pray.

[26 : 36] Father, we thank you tonight for this chapter here in Jonah, for the prayer of faith that he is praying. I ask that you would apply this to our hearts, that you would not let us forget about this.

I ask that you would be with us and help us when times are difficult. We thank you for your grace and that you have saved us through the atoning sacrifice of your Son Jesus Christ.

Forgive us all our sins in Jesus' name, we ask. Amen.