

INTRODUCTION

In our last sermon we left Jonah as he is thrown overboard by the sailors. He had tried to run away from God but found that you cannot run away from God and win. We are now given a glimpse of what was going through his mind and what was happening in his heart. After this great fish swallowed Jonah, he prays to God and through this prayer we have an account of what happened to him in the sea. He called out to God in His distress and the Lord answered him by providing a great fish to swallow him (v 2). The first thing I want you to notice is that:

1. GOD SAVES SINNERS

This is what we learn from chapter two of Jonah it is very simple but a very important truth that we all need to be reminded of. You see Jonah was a sinner; His sin was to run from God and refuse to obey Him. As a result God was angry with Jonah, and so he begins to deal with Jonah through the outworking of his providence. In chapter 1 Jonah thought that he had got away with it, when he got into the ship to go to Tarshish.

But God had other plans for Jonah, God wanted to show his compassion on the pagan city of Nineveh, and he had chosen Jonah as his chosen instrument. Jonah had sinned by disobeying the Lord and he ran away from the Lord resigning from his office as prophet. But God was not going to make it easy for Jonah to disobey and so he sends a great storm that eventually leads to Jonah facing up to his sin but still refusing to repent of it and refusing to return to the Lord. But God is not put off, and so he continues to deal with Jonah the sinner and backslider. He does this by bringing him to the brink of death.

As Jonah is thrown overboard certain death seems inevitable. You can picture the scene as Jonah flounders in the sea, going under the water once, then twice, at such a time what does Jonah do? He prays and the remarkable thing is that Jonah sees the fish as an answer to his prayer (v 2). The one great principle that Jonah learns from his dealings with God is that salvation is from the Lord (v 9), or as we put it God saves sinners.

We can apply this in two ways:

a) Salvation is of the Lord and therefore salvation is not found anywhere else or in anyone else. Jonah of course knew this, he was a prophet of God but Jonah can now say from his experience in the sea and in the fish that only God could have rescued him. Let me just say to anyone who may who as yet has not experienced God's salvation, that you will not find salvation outside of the Lord. I have to say that for many people live as if salvation was found in themselves or their own beliefs. If people really believed that salvation was found in the Lord then they would flee to him, but the truth is that many people do not flee to him because they believe that salvation is found in other ways. Let me explain this further. Its not that people don't believe in God or in heaven but the problem comes with how someone ends up in heaven or as we might say how is someone saved? If anyone believes that we end up in heaven because of our good works, our righteousness, or our religion then we simply do not yet understand God's way of salvation.

What was good about Jonah? What was so righteous about him? He was in rebellion against God, he was blatantly disobeying God and running from Him, yet God saved him (v 2). The only way to be saved is to realise that we are sinners, running from God, in blatant rebellion against God and disobeying him and therefore our only hope of salvation is for God to rescue us. He has provided the way to be rescued and saved from our sin in the person of Jesus Christ who came and gave his life for sinners.

b) We can apply this to true believers who have backslidden from God. Believers who God has spoken to and has told to go and obey him in a certain area of their lives and they have simply refused. They have rebelled against God and his word and they have run in the opposite direction from Him. They have resigned from his service and simply want God to leave them alone so that they can get on with their lives of rebellion. What hope is there for such a person? Their only hope is that God saves sinners and once a backslider faces up to his sin then he can be restored to fellowship with Him because God saves sinners.

Are you in a backslidden condition tonight? You know it is possible to go through all the motions of being a Christian and yet in your heart be in a backslidden condition. If God has put his hand upon you and has asked you to obey him in such and such an area of your life and you have refused to do so and in fact you have ceased to pray to him or read his word then you are in a backslidden condition. The only hope for you is to face up to it and cry out to God for mercy, for only God saves sinners.

2. GOD SAVES SINNERS FROM WHAT AND FOR WHAT.

It is true that God saves sinners but let me ask from what are we saved? In effect what was Jonah rescued from? Well we could say he was rescued from certain death and that is true, but there is a far deeper significance of Jonah's rescue. For Jonah was saved by God from God. Let me explain what I mean here. In verse 3 Jonah admits that it was God who hurled him into the sea and into certain death. But hold on a minute you might say to me, was it not the sailors who threw Jonah into the sea and did they not do so only at the request of Jonah himself. How can God get the blame? Well Jonah is perfectly aware that it was the sailors who threw him overboard but behind all the human actions in this story is God's actions and the sailors are only acting as God's instruments. It was because Jonah was rebelling against God and God was angry with Jonah that the storm came upon them.

God had every right to have Jonah thrown overboard and drown, that is what he deserved, but God in his graciousness chose to save him and therefore he was saved from God's wrath. Once again there is a very clear application here. Salvation is from the Lord, and when God saves us he actually saves us from his wrath. We are sinners, God is angry with sinners, we deserve his judgement and deserve to be banished from his presence forever.

But God in his marvellous grace chooses to save from his wrath. How does he do it? He does it through Jesus. Jesus when he died on the cross was taking upon himself not just our sin but God's wrath, so that we no longer face the consequences of our sins because Jesus has paid the price on our behalf and God is no longer wrathful towards us because we are now seen as having on us the righteousness of Christ. Isn't this a great truth? God saves sinners and he saves sinners from his wrath.

What about you? Are you saved? If you are not then God is wrathful towards you every day, he hates your sin and finds it abhorrent and deserving his judgement. God would have every right to send you to hell. But God's wrath and his love and compassion are not two opposites. God can be wrathful against sin and yet loving towards the sinner all at the same time.

Both are his constant attitude towards us. He demonstrates his wrath to us by allowing us to face the consequences of ignoring him and disobeying him (Romans 1:18ff). But he demonstrated his love towards sinners in sending his Son into this world to die for them (Romans 5:8).

The way one escapes God's wrath is to turn to Jesus as Saviour for either God pours out his wrath upon sinners individually or he poured out his wrath upon Jesus who died in the place of sinners

like us. If we refuse to accept Jesus and his death as payment for our sin by truly repenting and turning to him then we will continue now to face his wrath daily and finally we will face it when we are sent to hell. But the lesson from Jonah is that God saves sinners. Are you a sinner? Do you want to be saved? Turn to God.

But I said that God saves us from God's wrath but what is his purpose in doing so. What is he saving us for? He saves us to serve him. We will deal with this next time but why did God make the fish sick, so that Jonah is thrown up (literally) upon the dry land. The answer is given in 3:1-2. God has not forgotten about Nineveh, He is still concerned about that nation and now that Jonah has been saved from the wrath of God he is saved in order to serve his God. What was true of Jonah is true of all true believers.

Why after God saves us from our sin and His wrath does he not immediately take us to be with the Lord? After all there is nothing that a true believer wants more than to go to be with their Lord and Saviour. The simple reason is that God does not do so because he has a task for us to do, that task is to proclaim his message throughout our world. How do people hear the gospel? They do not hear it through a vocal voice from heaven but they hear it through people like you and me. God saves us and gives us the task of fulfilling his great commission (Matthew 28:20).

Once we begin to appreciate the salvation that we have received and appreciate that we have been saved from the wrath of God then we will I believe have no problems with the concept of serving the one who has saved us. Jonah was prepared to go to Nineveh as God's servant although as we will see he was not prepared for the result, Jonah had experienced the salvation of the Lord from his wrath and now at least he could understand why God wanted the Ninevites to know salvation from the Lord.

Have you come to appreciate your salvation Christian? Have you thought deeply about the salvation that Jesus wrought for you? Have you pondered the fact that you are saved for all eternity from the wrath of God and ultimately from hell? For once we have then I believe that we will see that we are not saved to serve ourselves, or saved for the benefit of the church, but we are saved to serve God in proclaiming that salvation to others. Are you doing that among your neighbours and family and friends?

God has saved you from the wrath to come therefore do not keep that to yourself, share it with others in whatever way you can. If you are failing to do that; then I would suggest that you get alone with God and ask him to show you the depths of your sin from which God saved you. Ask him to show you in your mind's eye the cost of Christ death in order to purchase your salvation. Ask him to give you a fresh appreciation of what it means to be saved from the wrath of God. Once we have caught a glimpse of that then serving God will come naturally to us.

Let us all examine ourselves. Are we saved, if not then remember that The Lord saves sinners. All you have to do is admit you are a sinner, and call as Jonah did upon God for mercy (v 2). Are you saved then remember that you are saved to serve, are you serving God, or are you backsliding and while at one time you loved to share your faith now you try to avoid doing so. Perhaps like Jonah you are running from God, then face up to it, return to the Lord, obey Him, enjoy serving Him and catch a glimpse again of what God has saved you from and what he has saved you for.

Amen