

Opening Scripture: [Psalm 18:1-6](#)

Introduction

Illustration

When I was in high school, I went swimming at a nearby lake with teenagers from church. At one point, we were floating in our life jackets pretty far from the boat. I was a fairly strong swimmer, so I decided to see if I could touch the bottom of the lake. I gave my life jacket to my friends, took a deep breath, and started swimming down. After a while, the water became very dark and very cold.

I didn't touch the bottom, but I decided that if I swam any farther down, I probably would not have enough breath to get to the surface. So, I turned and started swimming up. After swimming up for a long time, I began to worry. I didn't feel like I could go much longer without taking a breath, yet the water was still cold and dark. There was still no light shining to where I was.

I figured out later that I was not swimming straight up; I was swimming at a 45 degree angle, which is considerably longer than straight up. I remember the exact moment I concluded that I would not make it to the surface. I felt like I needed a breath immediately and it was still dark and cold. I almost gave up; then I saw a hint of light. That was all the encouragement I needed. I continued to swim, eventually surfaced, and gasped for breath. Since I had not swam straight up, I had surfaced quite a distance from my friends and my life jacket. Although I was exhausted, I had no choice but to swim to them.

Context

The book of Jonah is primarily about the nature of God. I would argue that the central verse of the book is [Jonah 4:2](#) "... I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster." Everything that happens in Jonah revolves around the God's nature.

In chapter 1, the Lord told Jonah to go speak against the evil of Nineveh. Jonah fled from God's presence and God's will. He went to Joppa and paid to take a ship to Tarshish. God intervened with a storm. Eventually, the sailors threw Jonah overboard and the Lord calmed the storm.

Chapter 1 shows God's nature. He is omnipresent; therefore, **no one is beyond the presence of the Lord**. He has authority over all of creation because He is the Creator; therefore, **no one is beyond the authority of the Lord**.

Main Idea

Today, we will read about the Lord's **mercy**. Jonah was completely lost; he had no hope. Jonah had no hope, because his hope was misplaced. *What is the basis of your hope?* If you, like Jonah, think that changing your circumstances is the basis of your hope, you will eventually see that your circumstances are unstable; therefore, your hope is unstable.

Where, then, should you place your hope? [Jonah 1:17-2:10](#) encourages us to place our hope in the Lord. This passage teaches us about the mercy of God. Because the Lord is merciful, **no one is beyond the salvation of the Lord**.

The Lord saved Jonah

First, we read that **the Lord saved Jonah when he had no hope**.

The great fish

How did the Lord save Jonah from the sea? [Jonah 1:17](#) “17 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.” This is probably the most well-known verse in Jonah. When I heard this story as a child, I assumed that this was God's judgment for disobedience. After all, being swallowed by a fish does not seem like a blessing. But this is the Lord's means of salvation.

What was the fish? Traditionally, people have called it a whale because we cannot imagine any other sea creature large enough to swallow a person. However, the Hebrew term (אִי), the Greek translation (κῆτος), and the New Testament Greek term (κῆτος) all simply refer to a large sea creature, without any further specification.

The type of fish is not significant. What is significant is **why** the fish swallowed Jonah. Notice in [Jonah 1:17](#) “17 And the Lord **appointed** a great fish ...” Jonah was not lucky. The Lord **appointed** this fish to save Jonah.

Jonah prayed for mercy

Chapter 2 records **Jonah's prayer** from the belly of the fish. *What was Jonah's response to being thrown into the sea?* [Jonah 2:1-2](#) “1 Then Jonah prayed to the Lord his God from the belly of the fish, 2 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.”

Think for a moment of the context of this prayer. In [Jonah 1](#), the only thing Jonah gets right is his theology ([Jon 1:9](#)). However, throughout the chapter, his actions contradict his theology. Jonah is in complete rebellion against God, yet in his hopelessness, he calls out to God for help. *How often do we do the same thing?* We ignore God. We run

from God. We rebel against God. Then, when we are in trouble and have no hope, we call out to the Lord.

How does God respond to His people when we ignore Him, then pray for help? Notice [Jonah 2:2](#) "...I called out to the Lord, out of my distress, and **he answered me...**" This does not mean that God will always save me from danger. He didn't spare Christ from the cross and he was far more deserving than me. It **does** mean that God does not compromise His nature when we are unfaithful. [2 Timothy 2:13](#) "13 if we are faithless, he remains faithful— for he cannot deny himself." **God saves His people when they are undeserving because He is merciful.**

What is Sheol? This word is used 65 times in the Old Testament. About one third of those times, describes a person going "down" to Sheol. It is often described as the pit or the depths. It is compared to the place of destruction and a prison. Sheol does not refer specifically to heaven or to hell; Sheol is a broad term that refers to death. Thus, [Jonah 2:2](#) means that Jonah was at the moment of death when he called out to the Lord.

The Lord saved Jonah from death

Why did Jonah call out to the Lord? The latter part of [Jonah 2](#) explains why Jonah called **to the Lord**. The beginning of the prayer explains why he called out. Jonah was about to die in the sea. [Jonah 2:3-6](#) "3 For you cast me into the deep, into the heart of the seas, and the flood surrounded me; all your breakers and your waves passed over me. 4 Then I said, 'I am driven away from your sight; yet I shall again look upon your holy temple.' 5 The waters closed in over me to take my life; the deep surrounded me; weeds were wrapped about my head. 6 To 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, O Lord my God."

I want to highlight three things about Jonah's description of sinking into the sea. First, **Jonah said that the Lord threw him into the sea.** [Jonah 2:3](#) "3 For you cast me into the deep, into the heart of the seas..." Yet, we read in [Jonah 1:15](#) "15 So they [the sailors] picked up Jonah and hurled him into the sea..." *Is this a contradiction?* Not at all. We frequently read in Scripture that God uses humans to accomplish his will. In our recent Wednesday night studies through Joshua and Judges, we have seen that Israel fights the battles, but the Lord gives the victory. Jonah did not end up in the sea by accident. He is in the sea because it was God's will.

Second, **Jonah went down.** [Jonah 2:6](#) "6 To the roots of the mountains I went down..." This may seem like an obvious point considering the context. Jonah was sinking into the sea. However, Scripture is pointing us to something more significant. [Jonah 1:3](#) "3 But Jonah rose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. He went **down** to

Joppa and found a ship going to Tarshish. So he paid the fare and went **down** into it, to go with them to Tarshish, away from the presence of the Lord.” [Jonah 1:5](#) “... Jonah had gone **down** into the inner part of the ship and had lain down and was fast asleep.” [Jonah 2:6](#) “6 To the roots of the mountains I went **down** ...” In [Jonah 1:3](#), Jonah made the decision to flee from God’s will and God’s presence. Since then, every step has been downward movement. [Jonah 2:6](#) describes Jonah literally hitting rock bottom. As we discussed earlier, Jonah is now completely **without hope**.

Third, Jonah describes **sinking** into the sea as **separation from the Lord**. [Jonah 2:4](#) “4 Then I said, ‘I am driven away from your sight ...’” This was Jonah’s goal in [Jonah 1:3](#); he wanted to get away from God. Now, as he faces death, he laments his separation from the Lord. **When we run from the Lord, the worst consequence we can receive is success.**

This experience is not unique to Jonah. In [Psalm 18](#), David says that the Lord saved him from Saul, describing God’s salvation much like Jonah. [Psalm 18:4-6](#) “4 The cords of death encompassed me; the torrents of destruction assailed me; 5 the cords of Sheol entangled me; the snares of death confronted me. 6 In my distress I called upon the Lord; to my God I cried for help. From his temple he heard my voice, and my cry to him reached his ears.” David, too, experienced hopelessness. So, he called out to the Lord and the Lord answered.

Conclusion

Notice how verse 6 concludes. [Jonah 2:6](#) “... Yet you brought up my life from the pit, O Lord my God.” Jonah’s prayer so far has emphasized his hopelessness. Jonah sinks to his death without any hope of life. Yet, [Jonah 2:6](#) ends with hope in the Lord. **The Lord saved Jonah when he had no hope.**

He offers the same to each of us. If you do not know God and face eternal condemnation because of your sin, He offers salvation through faith in Jesus. Apart from Jesus, we have no hope. If you know God (like Jonah) but are running from His will (like Jonah), He will rescue you from your own rebellion (like Jonah). **No one is beyond the salvation of the Lord.**

The Lord is merciful

Next, we read about **why** the Lord saved Jonah. The Lord’s actions are not separate from His nature. **The Lord saves because He is merciful.**

Jonah remembered the Lord

Why did Jonah pray to the Lord? Verses 3-6 explain the circumstances that instigated Jonah’s prayer for help. Verse 7-10 explain why he prayed **to the Lord**. [Jonah 2:7](#) “7

When my life was fainting away, I remembered the Lord, and my prayer came to you, into your holy temple.”

Jonah prayed because He **remembered** the Lord. Jonah’s repentance (although flawed) is based on the nature of God. Again, although Jonah is rebelling against the Lord, he has good theology. He recognizes that the Lord is merciful. The Lord’s salvation is not based on Jonah’s merit, but on God’s nature.

God’s nature is directly contrasted with idols. [Jonah 2:8](#) “8 Those who pay regard to vain idols forsake their hope of steadfast love.” God’s “steadfast love” (ἰσχυρὴ ἀγάπη) here refers to His mercy, love, and faithfulness toward His people (See [Exod 34:6](#)). God faithfully loves His people, but idols do not. As a culture, we spend so much of our lives pursuing people, possessions, and accomplishments that do not have the steadfast love of God. **We pray to the Lord because He is a merciful God.**

Salvation belongs to the Lord

What is Jonah’s conclusion to reflecting on the nature and work of God? [Jonah 2:9](#) “9 But I with the voice of thanksgiving will sacrifice to you; what I have vowed I will pay. Salvation belongs to the Lord!”” Jonah responds by devoting himself to the Lord. He will give thanks to the Lord for salvation. He will obey his commitment to God.

Jonah attributes salvation to the Lord (See [Psa 3:8](#)). This is a beautiful contrast with [Jonah 1](#). In [Jonah 1](#), we primarily see the Lord’s judgment. In reality, even the judgment we see in [Jonah 1](#) is the Lord’s grace to Jonah. Both judgment and salvation belong to the Lord. He is Savior of all the earth and Judge of all the earth. Therefore, our relationship with the Lord determines our salvation or judgment.

Conclusion

Why does the Lord save Jonah? One thing is clear; Jonah did not earn his salvation. Jonah ran from the presence and will of the Lord. He remained callous as he faced God’s judgment, choosing death over repentance. The only positive response we have seen so far in Jonah is his faith in the Lord to save.

The Lord did not save Jonah because of anything he had done. He saved Jonah because **God is merciful**. Rest assured that the same is true for us. *What do I have to offer God?* I can only offer my unrighteousness, my sin. I can offer my broken commitment to Him. The Lord does not save because of anything good within us. **The Lord saves because He is merciful.**

Eternal salvation

Jonah's Resurrection

How long was Jonah in the fish? [Jonah 1:17](#) “17 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.” [Jonah 2:10](#) “10 And the Lord spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah out upon the dry land.” Jonah sank to the depths of the sea, which he described as Sheol. The Lord appointed a fish to save him. On the third day, the fish vomited Jonah onto dry land.

Although this may seem to be a minor detail, it is worth noting that the “three days and three nights” is a semitic expression that refers to any portion of a three day period. For example, Esther says in [Esther 4:16](#) “16 “Go, gather all the Jews to be found in Susa, and hold a fast on my behalf, and do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my young women will also fast as you do. Then I will go to the king, though it is against the law, and if I perish, I perish.” Although she says she will go **after** the fast, [Esther 5:1](#) says she went on the third day, not after three days and three nights. It is important to understand this semitic expression when we are considering the timeline of Jesus's crucifixion and resurrection.

Jesus's resurrection

Jesus referenced the story of Jonah to teach about His resurrection. [Matthew 12:38–40](#) “38 Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered him, saying, “Teacher, we wish to see a sign from you.” 39 But he answered them, “An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. 40 For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.”

One of the purposes of the story of Jonah is to teach us about resurrection. Jonah said that he descended to Sheol, meaning that he almost died. He did not die and come back to life. He almost died and was saved. Similarly, in [Genesis 22](#), God instructs Abraham to sacrifice his son, Isaac. When he commits to the sacrifice, the Lord stops him and provides a ram in Isaac's place. [Hebrews 11:19](#) says that Isaac was figuratively resurrected. These Old Testament passages prefigure and foreshadow the resurrection of Jesus.

Jesus's death and resurrection were quite different than Jonah's, because Jesus was innocent. Although He was innocent, Jesus died as a criminal. He bore the guilt of our sins and was buried. Like Jonah in the fish, He was only in the grave three days. Jesus resurrected to life by His own power. Scripture teaches that Jesus over came the power of death by His resurrection so that we can have eternal life in Him. Jonah's salvation was temporary. The salvation we can have through Jesus is eternal.

Conclusion

Reflection

The Lord saved Jonah when he had no hope. I will ask again, *what is the basis of your hope?* We pursue wealth, recognition, comfort, and possessions, and we are left hopeless, because they are all temporary. [1 John 2:17](#) “17 And the world is passing away along with its desires ...” *Are you looking to temporary things for satisfaction and hope? Or are you looking to Christ for eternal hope?*

The Lord saves because He is merciful. *Do you trust in God’s mercy?* Your salvation at God’s judgment will not be based on your righteousness. No one is righteous. You can only be saved by the mercy of God. He offers us mercy through Jesus’s substitutionary death. If you reject Christ, you reject God’s mercy. If you believe in Christ, you will be saved by God’s mercy. *Do you daily live by faith in Christ alone?*

Jesus points to [Jonah 1:17-2:10](#) as a picture of His death and resurrection. Christ overcame death, and in Him, you can have eternal life. We are all dead in our sins ([Eph 2:1](#); [Rom 5:12](#)). Through faith in Christ, you will be made alive in the Holy Spirit ([Eph 2:5](#)) and will resurrect to eternal life in God’s eternal Kingdom. *Do you know God through faith in Jesus?*

Closing

Closing Scripture: [Ephesians 2:4–9](#) “4 But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, 5 even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— 6 and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, 7 so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. 8 For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, 9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast.”

No one is beyond the salvation of the Lord.