

Rescued By God

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: 18 August 2019

Preacher: Fred Stone

- [0 : 00] Three pastors were having lunch together at a restaurant. One of them said he wanted to let them know that he had found the most effective way to pray.
- He said, what you do is you sit, you fold your hands together, your fingers pointing toward heaven. That, he said, is just the best way for me to pray.
- The second pastor said, well, it's not for me. The most effective way that I have found to pray is to get on your knees. That's what most people do in the Bible, he said.
- It's just the most, best sign of humility. Well, the third pastor said, you're both wrong. The real way to pray for God to hear your prayer is to stretch out, lay flat on the floor with your face down.
- Well, there was a telephone repairman sitting at the table next to them and he had overheard what they said. And so he came up to them and said, excuse me, but I couldn't help but hearing your discussion.
- [1 : 07] I discovered the most effective way to pray when I was hanging upside down by my feet from a power pole 50 feet in the air.
- He said, that's when I prayed desperately. Now, the telephone repairman was right, wasn't he?
- The most effective way to pray has nothing to do with your posture. Now, I know most people don't worry about it, but there's been some people who've been hung up on that. Should I kneel?
- Should I stand? Should I really just lie flat on my face? Whatever works for you. Whatever way you can be still before the Lord, you do it.
- He's not really concerned about your posture. He's concerned more about your heart. It's all about our attitude. It's all about what's going on in our mind, in our heart, in our conscience.
- [2 : 13] What's really important when we approach God in prayer, or what's really important when we approach God, period, is to know that we are on a daily basis.
- We're desperate for Him. We're in desperate need of His grace. We're in desperate need of His help every day, every day of our lives.
- The most desperate prayer Jonah ever prayed was from the belly of the great fish, as we've been looking at in Jonah chapter 2. I want you to think with me.
- Why is it that God has to put us in a difficult situation to remind us how much we need Him? You know, when things are going well, I mean, when life's good, everybody's treating us well.
- You know, there's just peace at home, work's going well, school's not stressful, or school's not in session. When all's going well, we think we don't need God, at least in the sense of, maybe we don't talk to Him as much.
- [3 : 24] Maybe we're not as conscious or conscious of His, you know, aware of His presence. But when something happens, one of the first things that we as Christians do is to look to God.

Why is it we have to have such issues, crises, problems to cause us to be more focused on Him and our need for Him, to be close to Him?

This morning, we're going to look at good news. We're going to focus on how God is always ready and able to meet our needs when we call on Him with sincere faith, with a wholehearted commitment from a realization that we desperately need Him.

We're going to look at it in the life of Jonah. Look with me, if you would. Jonah 2, and I want us to look at verse 5 today. We're going to sort of be reminded of Jonah sinking into the ocean, about to drown when the great fish picked Him up and saved Him.

That was God's way of rescuing Him. Let's read in verse 5. The waters closed in over me to take my life. The deep surrounded me.

[4 : 52] That's when He's sinking into the ocean. Weeds were wrapped around 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, O Lord my God. When my life was fainting away, I remembered the Lord and my prayer came to you and to 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 have vowed, I will pay. Salvation belongs to the Lord. And when Jonah came to the Lord like he did, cried out to God for help, verse 10, and the Lord spoke to the fish and it vomited Jonah out upon the dry land.

I want us to look first at how God rescues us from a motivation of grace. I want us to understand we're talking about being desperate for God.

[6 : 06] We're talking about looking to Him, crying out for Him. But I want you to understand, when God comes to us in our times of need, He's coming because within Him there is love for us, there is His undeserved favor, His grace that motivates Him to come to us.

God answers our desperate prayers even while we are still suffering the consequences of our disobedience. Why did Jonah pray from the belly of the fish?

Because he'd been thrown overboard from the ship. The ship that he was on to deliberately try to get away from God and get away from doing God's will.

God sent the fish to graciously intervene in Jonah's life, to swallow Jonah, to keep him from drowning. The way God graciously rescued Jonah was not something out of the ordinary for God.

This is just how God works. We see it over and over again in the Bible. If you're familiar with the people of Israel, they were constantly as God's chosen people, seeing God work in their life in miraculous ways, work in their country for hundreds of years.

[7 : 34] They were constantly, though, rebelling against him, ignoring him, disobeying him, turning to idols, false gods. And when they did these things, God intervened to convict them, break them, discipline them.

And sooner or later, they got the message and they came back to him in confession and repentance over and over and over again. I want you to look at an example of God, just His graciousness.

It's in Psalm 106, beginning in verse 43. Again and again, He rescued them, but they chose to rebel against Him, and they were finally destroyed by their sin.

Even so, He pitied them in their distress and listened to their cries. He remembered His covenant with them and relented because of His unfailing love.

God puts up the light, doesn't He? He sure is gracious. I want you to understand, if you're in trouble right now because of your disobedience, understand that you can turn to God in desperate prayer and He will hear you.

- [8 : 57] It may be that what's going on in your, it may be that your way of disobeying God has affected your family life. It may be it's affected what's going on where you work.
- Your sin has gotten you into trouble. Your sin has caused a rift, actually a severance of a relationship. It may be that your sin is, in terms of other people, is secret.
- Nobody knows. The trouble you are experiencing, maybe it's depression, maybe it's anger. You're doing this.
- You're being disciplined by God. I want you to understand that if you'll just wake up, own up, confess that sin, God will hear.
- He doesn't have to, but God will. Even if it's the 10th or the 100th time you've come to Him this way, if you are truly serious, sincere, wholehearted, repentant, wanting to be forgiven and made right with God, He will graciously receive you, forgive you.
- [10 : 26] And what I want you to understand is, you don't have to clean up your own act before you do that. Some people have the idea, before I can ever come to God, I've got to clean up the mess I've made in my family.
- I've got to work on, make myself presentable to God. No, you don't. In order for you to clean up the mess, in order for you to become presentable, you need God's intervention.
- You need His spiritual, moral cleansing. You do need to admit your sin. You need to turn from your sin. You need to repent.
- But our gracious Heavenly Father wants you to come back to Him now as you are, where you are, just like rebellious and disobedient Jonah desperately called out to God when he was stuck in the belly of the great fish.
- Some of you, and nobody's told me anything, but some of you are stuck in some kind of morally wrong situation.
- [11 : 40] some of you are stuck right now in the consequence of your stubborn rebellion against God, against the teaching of His Word.
- Some of you are stuck and people around you are paying the price, just like people around Jonah suffered from his sin. That can end.
- You don't have to live in frustration. You don't have to live with that guilt. You don't have to be angry at everyone and everything around you.
- But you do have to stop, admit it, change your mind, look to God, admit you are desperate for Him.
- And I want to encourage you, do it now. This moment. Tune me out and you just go to the Lord in prayer.
- [12 : 42] Do what needs to be done. Jonah helps us to see that God rescues us because He's a gracious God. He's merciful.
- He didn't want to give us what we deserve. He wants to show us grace. But also, Jonah lets us see that there are no hopeless situations for God's people.
- Number two, God rescues us from situations that seem hopeless. That's what Jonah's situation was. Jonah was sinking to the bottom of the ocean and he describes it in this psalm.
- Look at it. The waters closed in over me to take my life. The deep surrounded me. Weeds were wrapped around my head at the roots of the mountains.
- I went down to the land whose bars closed upon me forever. Jonah was going to die. There was no way to escape if God had not intervened.
- [13 : 49] Sometimes we find ourselves in some situations where we can't really see how we can't see any light at the end of a tunnel.

All of us are capable of doing or saying things that can cause a lot of pain. The people that we love and really don't want to hurt. Sometimes we can cause problems, pain for people we don't even know.

Jonah did that, and we can hurt ourselves. We know that. It may be that in your situation you have so hurt some people, so wounded some people that you don't know that you can ever be reconciled, that they can ever forgive you.

I'm not going to promise what someone else is going to do. But we'll tell you this, even though there's times when we think we have gone too far, sunk too low for God to do anything, we haven't.

Jonah shows us that it's never too late for us to wake up and call out to him. Look what he says, yet you brought up my life from the pit, O Lord my God.

[15 : 18] Whenever our sinful actions put us in what appears to be a hopeless situation, we can never give up. We can never give up.

As long as you have breath, you do have hope. You know, we need to encourage people around about us that same idea, that same thought.

You may know some people right now, they're as low as low can be. they feel, and maybe they've expressed to you why they are hopeless.

I want to encourage you, don't let someone give up on life if you can help it. Don't let anyone think that they are beyond the reach of God's grace, of His help, of His forgiveness, of what He can do in their life.

Reach out to that person, encourage that person, listen to that person, and let that person know that it may be that their only hope is to be found in God, and His grace, His mercy, His involvement in their life, in the people's life they've affected, in the whole situation.

[16 : 43] we need to learn from Jonah, we saw last time in verse 2, to never hesitate to call out to God in our desperate situations.

Look at what He did. He says, I called out to the Lord out of my distress, and He answered me. Out of the belly of Sheol, I cried, the place of death, and you heard my voice.

I want to be clear. If there are situations that seem hopeless because of what someone else is or is not doing or saying, you have no control over that.

And I don't want for any moment to promise you what God's going to do in somebody else's life. But God will work in your life if you come to Him as Jonah did.

He may not make everything the way you want it, but if you're His child, He will be with you. And let's look on next at how God does intervene in our lives, but not always the way that we might choose.

[17 : 55] Number three, God rescues us in less than desirable ways at times. John Piper makes a helpful point about the way God sometimes rescues us.

Look at what He says. God answers our cries of distress in stages, not all of which are comfortable. We can be fairly sure that when Jonah cried out to God, he did not say, O God, put me in the belly of a fish for three days.

I want you to think about it. God graciously saved Jonah by having a fish to swallow him. That's not what he prayed for. When he cried out to God to save him, that's not what he had in mind.

He probably said, God save me, have mercy, or something like that. Piper goes on, God's answer came in stages. The belly of a fish hardly seems like salvation, but it was.

Jonah is granted enough consciousness to realize he's been spared from drowning and that there is hope. He does not complain about his surroundings.

[19 : 10] He accepts God's first stage of salvation as a guarantee of dry land and concludes his prayer in the fish's belly with the great affirmation deliverance belongs to the Lord.

I want us to understand and see in this. God graciously invites us to call out to him in prayer during our times of need.

And when he answers our prayer, however he answers our prayer, we need to be thankful and we need to accept that answer that partial answer, even that no answer and not complain.

I'm sure some of you read this past week the story about the young man in India who received a new BMW from his parents for his 22nd birthday.

You know what he did? He pushed it into a river because it wasn't the Jaguar he wanted. You talk about a moron to be given a BMW brand new.

[20 : 33] And you can look it up when you go home, look it up online. There's a YouTube video of the moron who puts his BMW in the water because he's mad that didn't get a Jaguar.

Can you imagine someone being so arrogant, so ungrateful, so spoiled?

Now think, how do you respond to the gracious gifts that God's given you? How have you responded, how do you respond to the gift of your spouse?

Now there's some smart aleck women in here. You're saying he's God's gag gift to me. I read that somewhere.

Men are God's gag gifts to women. And some of you guys may be, I don't know, but all of us are not, are we? Lisa's in the other service, thankfully.

[21 : 49] I didn't do this in the first service. I don't want to know the answer to that. But I want you to think, how do you respond to God when he doesn't answer your prayers the way that you wanted him to?

Do you thank him? Do you accept that he's God, he knows best, and to make the best of it with the right attitude?

You know, Jonah is not a good example in most of this book. In chapter one, he's a terrible example. In chapter four, he's an even worse example.

We'll see that later. But here in chapter two, Jonah is a great example, a model of gratitude to God as he thanked God for rescuing him by having a fish swallow him.

Jonah had a good perspective. love. So he understood that being alive in a fish's belly was far better than being dead on the bottom of the ocean. We need to learn to never be ungrateful for what God gives us, for what God does in our lives, for the way he answers our prayers.

[23 : 21] Like Piper said, sometimes God answers us in stages. And sometimes those stages are uncomfortable. Sometimes they're God's discipline still, but remember, when God disciplines us, it's because he's our father and he loves us.

And he always has a redemptive purpose. Let's look at one more thing. Number four, God rescues us for the purpose of renewing us and using us.

verses eight and nine, some people refer to that as sort of like a post script to Jonah's prayer. It's a concluding expression of thanks, of praise, and commitment.

I want you to look at verse eight again. Those who pay regard to vain idols forsake their hope of steadfast love. We don't know why Jonah brings up idols here.

Maybe he has the sailors in mind because they worshiped false gods back in chapter one, back when he was on the ship. Maybe he brings it up because he knows many people are going to hear this being read in written form or they're going to read it.

[24 : 42] And Israel always had a problem with idolatry. So, maybe Jonah writes this because he knows that even God's people back then and today have problems with idols.

Peter Williams explains this. I want you to look at what he says. He says, the essence of idolatry is anything that commands the central place in our lives and to which we give the loyalty and devotion which rightly belongs to God alone.

That's what idolatry is. Given to anyone or anything that which should belong to God. He goes on to say, for some people money is their God and the pursuit of materialistic goals dominates their lives.

But we can make an idol of anything, sports, sex, drugs, politics, career, even home and family. Now just think, anything that is at the center of your life, except God, that is your idol.

God should be the center, the focus, the hub of our lives. And if he's not, whatever else is there, that is our idol. Williams goes on to conclude, to warn us that idols will always let us down.

[26 : 10] They will always fail to deliver in the long run on what they promise. Whatever you put your real emphasis on and make your idol, sooner or later, it's going to disappoint you.

It's not going to meet the need that you want it to meet. You know, many of the things that we make idols are actually gifts of God's grace.

God gives us things like a family, a home, a career, sports, music, sex, money, and material things.

God gives us all these things to meet legitimate God-given needs. God wants us to use these things, to enjoy these things.

But he wants us to never lose sight of the fact that these are gifts that come from him, the giver. And our ultimate source of joy is the giver who's given us these things.

[27 : 32] Jonah ends his prayer with an expression of thanksgiving and commitment in verse 9. He promises to offer sacrifices to God. We don't do that kind of thing today.

We don't offer animal sacrifices for an example. Because Jesus was the ultimate and the final sacrifice for our sins. And God has accepted his sacrifice.

So we don't do that. We shouldn't do that. It would be wrong to do that. But Paul says in Romans chapter 12 that we are to be living sacrifices.

We're supposed to produce good works, he tells us in other places, out of gratitude for God's gift of salvation. Our sacrifices, our good works may take the form of giving our time in serving the Lord.

As we give our time, we give our talents. We give our money. We give what God has given us. We give it back to him. To serve him, to serve his people, to serve his purposes.

[28 : 45] How do you express your gratitude and love to God for the way that he has rescued you from sin and death? How do you show your gratitude to God for the way that he has blessed you with the good gifts?

What kind of sacrifices or efforts do you offer back to him motivated by love, motivated by gratitude? How do you show him?

You know, Jonah's vow, he talks about next, is most likely his promise to obey God's call to go back to Nineveh, which we're going to start looking at next week in chapter 3. The final word of this prayer may be the most important one.

Salvation belongs to the Lord. And we're going to look at a lot of implications of that in chapter 3 and 4 as we move on through Jonah. But Jonah now realizes that God put him in the ocean and the fish not to destroy him, but to save him, to rescue him, not just physically but spiritually, to rescue him in order to use him again.

If you are away from the Lord due to your disobedience, due to your sinful actions, I want you to know that you can come back to him right now.

[30 : 18] And I want to encourage you to come back now because you want to, you're ready to, and don't wait for God to discipline you like he did Jonah. I've tried to emphasize throughout this.

I emphasize it in a big way in another message. If you are God's person, if God has chosen you, saved you, and is working in you for a specific purpose, sometimes he is so determined that you will do it that he'll do whatever it takes to put you in a position where you'll say, I'm ready to do it.

And that's what he did for Jonah. Sometimes God lets us miss out on blessings, but sometimes he is so determined that he's going to use us that he'll put us flat on our back.

He put Jonah in the belly of a whale, but he will use us. Wouldn't it be so much easier, so much easier for us to do it at God's call?

Think about how you get disciplined. Some of you in this room maybe. There probably have been times in this room where you sitting with your parents or grandparents, you've cut up some.

[31 : 39] Maybe your parent or grandparent, at first they put their hand on your leg. But you don't get it. And so they pinch you on the flabby part of your arm.

But you're hard-headed. So they get this place in your neck where you just go to your knees. And then you get it.

Or they just wait till you get home and just wear your rear end out. In some ways, God's discipline is like that.

I think a lot of times God starts out just putting his hand on our leg just to let us know, straighten up. Obey me. Do what's right.

Sometimes he has to pinch us. Sometimes he has to grab us and put us on our knees. But sometimes we can be very, very bull-headed and hard-headed.

[32 : 42] And sometimes God will just whip us. And that's what he did to Jonah. It's taken me most of my life. I still don't always.

But it's better to do things the easy way. And I want you, if there's something going on, you're just not close to God the way you know you should be.

You have been maybe. And God's trying to call you back. Do it the easy way. Call out to him right now and let him know that you are confessing your sin.

You're turning from that disobedient attitude. And you're going to do things his way. Because you love him. You trust him. And you know his way is the best way.

Let's pray together. Father, show us now how we should respond to you. To your pursuit. To your conviction.

[33 : 49] To your encouragement maybe. And help us to do it. Help us to respond to you, our gracious Father.

And Lord, if there are people in this room who are not Christians, help them to see that right now they need to understand they are far from you, separated from you by their sin.

And their only hope is to admit it. Turn from that way of life, that attitude. Trust Jesus as their Savior. Help them to call upon him right now.

Let's just all listen to the Lord and obey him during this time. And if I could pray with you, I'd be honored to do that right here at the front in these next few minutes. knowledge of the someday.

My family of mine is a POWER and a EVER master.■■■■ A He ■■■■■■■■■■ be