

March 8, 2009 by Steve Brandon



Jonah Receives Mercy

Jonah 2

1. Overview (verse 2).
2. Review (verses 3-6).
3. Prayer (verse 7).
4. Promise (verses 8-9).

This past summer, our family obtained this past summer. The book is entitled, "The WORST-CASE SCENARIO Survival Handbook." It's a book that deals with the emergencies of life that you may find yourself encountering, if you are in the habit of living life way on the edge. For instance, it says on the front cover of the book, ...

HOW TO:

- ... Escape from Quicksand,
- ... Wrestle an Alligator,
- ... Break Down a Door,
- ... Land a Plane.... [\[1\]](#)

As you look upon the table of contents, it deals with various escapes, like how to escape from a sinking car. It deals with defending yourself, such as, how to fend off a shark or how to win a sword fight. It deals with various leaps of faith, like jumping from a cliff into a river, or like maneuvering on top of a moving train to get inside. It deals with emergencies, explaining how to identify a bomb or how to treat frostbite. It deals with survival in the most difficult circumstances, like surviving an avalanche, or surviving if your parachute fails to open.

Along with the book came a game, called, "The WORST-CASE SCENARIO Survival Game." The game consists of a box of cards. Each card has on it a title that begins with, "How to ..." For instance, "How to escape from killer bees." or "How to survive going over a waterfall." Each card gives three answers to the question, only one of which is the correct answer. The way that we like to play the game is pretty easy. The leader reads the card all the way through. Then, he gives a moment for you to think about it. Then, he reads the card through a second time. After this, the players need to decide which solution they think is the correct one. Then, the leaders says, "One, ... Two, ... Three." At that point, everyone in the holds up one finger, or two fingers, or three fingers, depending upon which answer they think that it is. If you get it right, you forward one space on the board. If you get it wrong, your piece on the board remains where it is.

For instance, on one card, it says, "How to escape from killer bees." Now, chose which is the best answer, ...

- A. Jump int a body of water if you are near one.
- B. Run away as fast as you can.
- C. Stand still. [\[2\]](#)

Here's another card. It says on the top, "How to survive going over a waterfall."

- A. Dive headfirst with your hands protecting your head from rocks.
- B. Taking a deep breath, jump feet first. Wrap your arms around your head to protect it, and swim away from the falls as soon as you hit the water.
- C. Breathe calmly. Jump out and grab your knees to your chest in a "cannonball" formation. [\[3\]](#)

Here's one last card: "How to cross a piranha-infested river."

- A. Quickly and quietly cross the river at night while they are sleeping.
- B. Wait until you see them feeding, then cross the river while they are distracted.
- C. Cross the river in the early morning, and throw stones behind you to distract them. [\[4\]](#)

In our exposition of the book of Jonah, we have come to chapter two, where Jonah has definitely found himself in a "worst-case scenario." He was drifting at sea, ending up in the stomach of the fish. While there, he may have wanted a book like this. I searched the book, and I searched through the entire box of cards, and I saw a few things that may have helped him in his drift at sea. For instance, There were some cards labeled with the following:

- How to survive adrift at sea.

- How to remain afloat in the sea for long periods.
- How to swim in the ocean safely.
- How to swim in heavy seas.
- How to know avoid a shark attack.

I didn't see anything that talked about "how to escape from inside a big fish." So, even if Jonah had this book, it really wasn't going to help him too much in getting out of the stomach of the fish alive. Now, the good news is that Jonah did escape. How? He did it by praying.

This morning, our text is found in Jonah, chapter 2. It is Jonah's prayer in the stomach of the fish. Consider his prayer, ...

Jonah 1:17-2:10

And the LORD appointed a great fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was in the stomach of the fish three days and three nights. Then Jonah prayed to the LORD his God from the stomach of the fish, and he said, ...

I called out of my distress to the LORD, And He answered me
 I cried for help from the depth of Sheol; You heard my voice.
 For You had cast me into the deep, into the heart of the seas,
 And the current engulfed me, all Your breakers and billows passed over me.
 So I said, "I have been expelled from Your sight
 Nevertheless I will look again toward Your holy temple."
 Water encompassed me to the point of death
 The great deep engulfed me, weeds were wrapped around my head.
 I descended to the roots of the mountains
 The earth with its bars was around me forever,
 But You have brought up my life from the pit, O LORD my God.
 While I was fainting away, I remembered the LORD,
 And my prayer came to You, into Your holy temple.
 Those who regard vain idols forsake their faithfulness,
 But I will sacrifice to You with the voice of thanksgiving
 That which I have vowed I will pay.
 Salvation is from the LORD."

Then the LORD commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah up onto the dry land.

In verse 17 (of chapter 1), Jonah finds himself in the stomach of a great fish. His path to that fish was one of rebellion. Last week, we looked at how the word of the LORD came to Jonah, the son of Amittai, instructing him to go to Nineveh. Jonah was a prophet from Gath-hepher (which is another name for Galilee). He was a great prophet in Israel, who prophesied of great military success in the days of Jerobaom II, who reigned in Israel 793-753 B. C. But now, the LORD was calling Jonah to be a missionary to Nineveh.

Now, I'm not sure that the thought of being a missionary would have been difficult for Jonah. But, a missionary to Nineveh was another matter. The Ninevites were the arch-enemies of Israel. The thought of God extending mercy to the Ninevites was too much for Jonah to handle. So, Jonah fled to Tarshish upon a boat (according to chapter 1, verse 3). But, God pursued Jonah, by sending a storm upon the sea (verse 4) and by pricking his conscience by the words of the captain, which were the same words that God had spoken to Jonah, "Get up, ... call out." (verse 6). When that failed to get Jonah's attention, God continued to bring the heat, by directing the lots cast by the sailors (verse 7), by giving him an example of those who feared the Lord (verses 8-14), and by calming the seas when Jonah was cast overboard (verse 15). And beginning in verse 17, we will see the LORD continuing His pursuit of Jonah by sending a great fish to swallow him and preserve his life, that he might live another day.

As I mentioned last week, I believe this to be a real fish. I believe that Jonah spent several days in this fish. How he survived, I'm not sure. I believe that it was a miracle, along with the other miracles that take place in this story, like the storm and the lots and the calming of the sea, and perhaps the most incredible of all: the repentance of Nineveh. But critics have dismissed this story as mere a fable.

The story is told of the school teacher, Mrs. Crump, who was teaching biology to young children.

One day, the teacher began class by saying, "Today we're going to study in Zoology and the first subject in Zoology we're going to study will be whales. Does anyone know anything about whales?"

No-one raised their hand. Then little Sally raised her hand. Mrs. Crump said, "What do you know about whales Sally?"

Sally said, "Jonah was swallowed by a whale!"

Mrs. Crump said, "That's nonsense! The throat of the whale is too narrow to swallow a man! Where did you get that foolish supposition?"

Sally replied, "That's what my Bible says!"

Mrs. Crump retorted, "Your Bible is wrong! As I said, a whale's throat is too narrow to swallow a man. What do you think

now?"

Sally thought for a minute and then said, "I guess I'll have to wait until I get to heaven and ask Jonah himself what happened."

Mrs. Crump thought she'd be smart and asked Sally, "What happens if Jonah isn't there to ask?"

Again Sally thought for a minute and then said, "Then I guess YOU will have to ask him." [\[5\]](#)

Some well-meaning Christians have sought examples in history where people were swallowed by a whale and survived to tell about it. The story most often used as an illustration is the story of "James Bartley," who, according to legend, was an English commercial fisherman in the late 1800's, who was thrown from his whaling ship, the "Star of the East" while they were off the Falkland Islands. James was presumed to be lost at sea. Legend has it, "Later, he is discovered alive inside a whale that is harpooned by the whaling ship. He is taken back to England where after receiving medical treatment he lives out his life, although his skin is blemished by the gastric juices of the whale." [\[6\]](#)

Although, many people refer to this incident as proof of Jonah's experience, such a story is probably legend, and didn't really happen. The ship was a real ship, which gave credibility to the story. However, the wife of the captain is reported to have said, "There is not one word of truth to the whale story. I was with my husband all the years he was in the Star of the East. There was never a man lost overboard while my husband was with her. The sailor has told a great sea yarn." [\[7\]](#)

In the end, it doesn't matter much whether anyone else has ever been swallowed by a whale. The Bible says that Jonah was in the stomach of this fish for three days and three nights. And I believe it. It's a miracle. Now, I stand on firm footing in believing this miracle, because Jesus believed this miracle. He said, "Just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the sea monster, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth" (Matthew 12:40). If the story of Jonah were untrue, then the story of Christ in the grave for three days and three nights would be untrue. If that were not true, then, we are following a lie, and of all men, we are most to be pitied (1 Cor. 15:19).

Now, what did Jonah do in the stomach of this fish? He prayed. We read in verse 1 that "Jonah prayed to the LORD his God from the stomach of the fish." Prayer is probably the first thing that you should do whenever you might find yourself in a worst-case scenario. Prayer ought to be on all of the cards in the game. God is the one who will rescue you if you ever find yourself in an avalanche. God is the one who will protect you, should you ever need to jump from a moving train. God is the one who will help you stay afloat when adrift at sea, if and when he sends a ship to come and rescue you.

As I studied this passage this week, one thing came crystal clear to me this week: the usefulness of the Psalms. Jonah's prayer is a stream of verses from the Psalms. Below I have put portions of the Psalms next to Jonah's prayer. The amount of agreement is amazing.

Psalm 120:1, "In my trouble I cried to the LORD, and He answered me."	Jonah 2:2, "I called out of my distress to the LORD, And He answered me
Psalm 86:13, "You have delivered my soul from the depths of Sheol."	I cried for help from the depth of Sheol; You heard my voice."
Psalm 88:6, "You have put me in the lowest pit, In the dark places, in the depths.	Jonah 2:3, "For You had cast me into the deep, into the heart of the seas,
Psalm 42:7, "All Your breakers and Your waves have rolled over me."	And the current engulfed me, all Your breakers and billows passed over me."
Psalm 31:22, "As for me, I said in my alarm 'I am cut off from before Your eyes.'"	Jonah 2:4, "So I said, 'I have been expelled from Your sight Nevertheless I will look again toward Your holy temple.'"
Psalm 5:7, "But as for me, ... at Your holy temple I will bow in reverence for You."	
Psalm 69:1, "The waters have threatened my life."	Jonah 2:5, "Water encompassed me to the point of death The great deep engulfed me, weeds were wrapped around my head."
Psalm 69:2, "I have come into deep waters, and a flood overflows me."	
Psalm 18:4 - "The cords of death encompassed me, ..."	
Psalm 88:6, "You have put me in the lowest pit, In dark places, in the depths.	Jonah 2:6, "I descended to the roots of the mountains The earth with its bars was around me forever,
Psalm 18:5 - "The cords of Sheol surrounded me;"	But You have brought up my life from the pit, O LORD my God."
Psalm 40:2, "He brought me up out of the pit of destruction, Out of the miry clay."	
Psalm 61:2, "I call to You when my heart is faint;"	Jonah 2:7, "While I was fainting away, I remembered the LORD, And my prayer came to You, into Your holy temple."
Psalm 77:2, "In the day of my trouble I sought the Lord."	
Psalm 18:6, "He heard my voice out of His temple"	
Psalm 31:6-7, "I hate those who regard vain idols, ... I will rejoice and be glad in your lovingkindness."	Jonah 2:8, "Those who regard vain idols forsake their faithfulness,"
Psalm 116:17-18, "To You I shall offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving, ... I shall pay my vows to the LORD."	Jonah 2:9, "But I will sacrifice to You with the voice of thanksgiving That which I have vowed I will pay. Salvation is from the LORD."
Psalm 3:8, "Salvation belongs to the LORD."	

Some of Jonah's statements are exact quotations from the Psalms. Some of these were very close. Here's the implication of this: though none of the Psalmists ever found themselves in the stomach of a big fish, there is enough material in the Psalms for Jonah to plea to the LORD for help using their phraseology. In other words, the Psalms are capable of providing us with prayers for every troublesome scenario in which we find ourselves.

I don't know fully all of the details of your situation this morning, I know that some of you are struggling with unemployment, distressed about the state of your marriage, captivated by pornography, having difficulties with your children, dealing with the death of loved ones, facing a future of uncertainties, have family members who are sick, hurting by the actions of other people, battling depression. The list can easily go on and on with your particular problems. I know that there are many other hurts in this room of which I know nothing. But, the good news is this. God knows about what you are dealing with. And God has provided us a book that is sufficient to give you wisdom how to pray to Him for help.

The Psalms may not contain a situation exactly like the one that you are going through. But, if Jonah could dig through the Psalms and pray a prayer that met his situation exactly, I'm sure that you can find sufficient prayer material in the Psalms to help you in your troubles as well. So many of the Psalms were written in times of distress, by the people of God, that it is a book that is especially helpful to you when you find yourself in a "worst-case scenario." And nothing helps to bring the Psalms alive than a problem of your own.

Perhaps you have experienced it. I know that I have. A Psalm that I have read a dozen times before without impact, has come alive to me in a new and fresh way when in the midst of a trial. For instance, consider an application look at Psalm 23. ...

If you are dealing with ...	then, you can be helped by Psalm 23.
Unemployment	The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want.
Anxiety	He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside quiet waters.
Unbelief	He restores my soul.
Temptation	He guides me in the path of righteousness for His name's sake.
Depression	Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for you are with me.
Uncertainties in the future	Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.
The hurts of others	You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.
Sickness	You have anointed my head with oil; My cup overflows.
Discouragement	Surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

And so, I commend the Psalms to you. Not only for when you get into the day of trial, but especially beforehand, so that you can be as Jonah, and have the Psalms flow off your list when you are in the midst of your trouble some day. Notice how Jonah prayed these things without Bible in hand, but from memory.

I know that I have been greatly challenged by Jonah's prayer, which is so heavy in the Scriptures. I have been greatly challenged to work at internalizing God's word, that I would be ready in the day of crisis, as Jonah was. Just as the Psalms are applicable beyond their initial context, so also will Jonah's Psalm have many applications for us as well.

Jonah may be describing his experiences of drowning at sea and being swallowed by a big fish, which you may never experience. However, I'm sure that you will find some application here for your life. With that as an extended introduction, let's look at Jonah's Psalm, it's essentially a Psalm of mercy, as that is what Jonah has received. By way of outline, I have divided Jonah's prayer into four sections. Each of the sections, I have identified with one word that captures the thrust of the section.

Jonah begins his prayer with ...

1. Overview (verse 2).

Verse 2 is a summary of what Jonah experienced. He said, "I called out of my distress to the LORD, and He answered me. I cried for help from the depth of Sheol; You heard my voice." Beginning in verse 3, Jonah will be a bit more specific with more of the details of his salvation from the sea. But, here He gives an overview of everything that took place in Jonah's peril. He was in danger and distress, and he called out to the LORD, and the LORD was gracious to answer his prayer. He saved him from his certain death.

In some sense, it seems as if this verse is misplaced. It seems as if Jonah gave praise to the LORD with these words after he was upon dry land, looking back at the entire fish event. Indeed, it may be that this entire prayer of Jonah is in retrospect, looking back upon what took place in his life. After all, these words aren't so much a prayer for help as they are a prayer of thanksgiving for the way that God had already rescued Jonah. But, according to verse 1, these words were prayed while he was in the stomach of the fish. Here's the key to these verses. **Jonah 2 isn't a prayer for deliverance from the stomach of the fish. Rather, Jonah 2 is a prayer of thanks for his deliverance from drowning.** When he was in the stomach of the fish, Jonah felt somewhat secure, especially in comparison with what he had just experienced.

You can easily picture Jonah flailing about upon the sea, trying to stay above water. But, after a bit of time, he begins to sink down into the water. And then, you can see him becoming distressed about his situation. See, it's one thing to talk about dying, like he did on the ship. It's another thing to be drowning, like Jonah was. Jonah felt himself to be dead. He said that he cried from the depth of Sheol. Sheol is a Hebrew word that often means, "the grave." Jonah was on the precipice of death and he cried to the LORD for help.

We don't know what he said, but it was probably something like this, "Help!" Except, he was under water, so we wouldn't have been able to hear it. All we would have heard was bubbles. But, God certainly heard his prayer. Perhaps even the prayer was a silent prayer, in which Jonah was screaming for help in his mind. God, in his mercy heard Jonah and answered Jonah's prayer for help. That was Jonah's overview (verse 2).

Beginning in verse 3, we see Jonah's ...

2. Review (verses 3-6).

He reviews the details of his rescue. Let's begin in verse 3, "For You had cast me into the deep, into the heart of the seas, and the current engulfed me. All Your breakers and billows passed over me." Again, we see Jonah here in the depth of the seas. He is below the surface of the water. He is in the deep. He is in the heart of the sea. Jonah wasn't merely drifting down in the water peacefully. He was engulfed by the current of the sea. The breakers and billows were over him.

Notice how Jonah attributes his perilous situation to the hand of the Almighty. He said, "**You** had cast me into the deep." Jonah was under "**Your** breakers and billows." But wait, Jonah, wasn't it the sailors who threw you overboard? (1:15). But wait, Jonah, wasn't it you who had instructed them to throw you overboard? (1:12). How can you say that it was the LORD who cast you into the deep? Jonah saw the true reality of what was going on aboard the ship. God was pursuing Jonah. He had hurled the sea. He had directed the lot. He had shown Jonah of his disobedience. Behind whatever the sailors did to Jonah, was the sovereign hand of God, doing whatever it took to bring Jonah back to Himself.

It is amazing here that Jonah's rebellious acts weren't the acts of an unbeliever. They were the acts of a God-fearing man. Jonah was widely known as a prophet of God throughout Israel. But, in his rebellion, He had fled from God's call upon his life. To be sure, God wasn't too pleased with his actions. But, God was merciful to him, calling this man back to Himself.

Are you running from the LORD today? God may be bringing distress into your life to call you back to Himself. Look at what God did to Jonah. The circumstances in the life of Jonah didn't come about by accident. They came about because of God's sovereign, merciful hand to bring him back. Are there circumstances in your life that can only be explained by God's pursuit of you, even though you have run from Him? The circumstances upon your life may not be as they appear. It may not be "the bad economy" that has caused you to lose your job. It may not be "coincidence" that you are sick. It may not be "chance" that you had that accident. It may be God pursuing you because of your sin.

Oh, let's be careful here. These things may come about in your life because you are doing well, and God wants to prune your life so that you produce more fruit (John 15:2). But, it may be because of some running. If it is, follow the path of Jonah and pray.

We see Jonah's hope in verse 4, "I have been expelled from Your sight. Nevertheless I will look again toward your Holy temple." Jonah felt as if his plunge into the sea was a sending away from God. Jonah had tried to run from God, and now he felt that he had arrived, "expelled from Your sight," as if God couldn't see him deep in the sea. And yet, Jonah had hope.

Jonah says, "There will be a day when he will once again look upon the holy temple." This may have been a hope for heaven. The "Holy temple" is the way that David described heaven, in Psalms 11:4. It is where the LORD is seated. It's where He reigns. It's where He tests the sons of men. In verse 7, Jonah spoke of the "holy temple," in heaven. This phrase may also mean that Jonah had a hope for rescue, that one day he would be again among the worshipping throng again in Jerusalem. Whichever it means, the idea is that Jonah will again be in the presence of the LORD. This is in contrast to the first part of verse 4, in which Jonah mentioned how he was expelled and pushed away from the presence of the LORD. Now, he talks about returning to his presence, which is his hope.

In verses 5 and 6, again Jonah reviews the ways in which the LORD rescued him. He wrote, "Water encompassed me to the point of death the great deep engulfed me, weeds were wrapped around my head. I descended to the roots of the mountains the earth with its bars was around me forever." Jonah paints a pretty bleak picture here. Water is all around him. He is at the point of death. The deep has swallowed him. The seaweed has wrapped itself completely around Jonah's head. He felt himself descending deeper and deeper into the water, to the bottom of the sea. He felt himself hemmed in, with nowhere to turn.

And then, comes the mercy of God (at the end of verse 6), "But You have brought up my life from the pit, O LORD my God." The best we can figure is that the big fish got Jonah from deep in the sea, and carried him away in the vessel of his salvation. God, in his mercy heard Jonah and answered Jonah's prayer for help and saved him by means of a big fish.

The big lesson for us to learn here is God's mercy. You need to catch how much God's answer to Jonah came as mercy. In light of everything that Jonah had done, it would have been perfectly just for God to have left Jonah in the water to drown. He was the prophet of God, who was, in no way ignorant of God. This entire chapter demonstrates the incredible knowledge that Jonah had of the Scripture. But, Jonah had disobeyed the call of God upon his life to go to Nineveh. He had been hard-hearted. When all around him were calling out to their God, Jonah seemingly refused to pray to the LORD. Furthermore, it seems as if Jonah wanted to die. He told the sailors, "Pick me up and throw me into the sea. Then the sea will become calm for you, for I know that on account of me this great storm has come upon you" (1:12). You might call this, "Sailor Assisted Suicide."

For some reason, while in the sea, he cried to the Lord for help. I wouldn't be surprised if the actual process of dying was too much for him. When he was under water, and his lungs were running out of air, and he began to feel the pains of his oxygen debt, it seems as if he wanted to live, after all. So, he called to the Lord, and God rescued him by sending a big fish to carry him back to the land of Israel, that he might go to Nineveh.

God was under no obligation to save him from drowning. There is no promise in the Bible that God had made, "If my prophet, who was called according to my own name, would humble himself and pray and seek My face and turn from his wicked way, then I will hear from heaven, will forgive his sin and will rescue him out of the depths of the waters" (see 2 Chron. 7:14). God has made no such promise. Yet, by His sheer mercy, God rescued Him. This is the point of my message this morning: "Jonah receives mercy."

There is much here for us to glean. The theme of Jonah is a question, "Do You Love Mercy?" God loves mercy. He loves to give mercy. God often extends mercy to his creatures. In fact, we know so much of His mercy, that we begin to presume upon His mercy, as if that's the way that He always acts. To be sure, it is very presumptuous of us. But, such is the pattern of God. We know of His mercy. We often experience His mercy. And that's the very thing that makes it easy for us to come to God.

Have you known and experienced the mercy of God upon your soul? Have you come to a point of desperation like Jonah and cried to the Lord for mercy? Have you seen the horrors of your sin and pleaded the Lord to forgive? God loves mercy. Have you received it? Do you love mercy?

What about you? Do you love to give mercy as freely as you have received it? One way to test this in your life is to think about how willing others are to come to you, especially when they have wronged you. If your pattern is one of granting great mercy and grace and kindness and forgiveness, people will readily come to you. But, if the pattern of your life is to hold grudges and hatred within your heart, people won't come to you. When people think of you, what do they think of? Do they think of one who is ready to forgive and extend help? The fruit of forgiveness. Or, do they think of you as one who will turn them away? Do you love mercy? I'm thankful that God loves mercy. And so was Jonah.

We have seen the overview (verse 2) and the review (verses 3-6). And now, in verse 7, we see the ...
3. Prayer (verse 7).

Verse 7 speaks about the circumstance surrounding Jonah's prayer. We will look at this verse only briefly. Jonah said it this way, "While I was fainting away, I remembered the LORD, and my prayer came to You, into Your holy temple."

Drowning victims will hold their breath under water as long as possible. But, at some point, as the brain is deprived of its needed oxygen, the victim will blackout and lose consciousness. Jonah describes his process of fainting away. This was probably the point near when he was about to black out. It was then that he remembered the LORD. It was then that he prayed to Him. The sense is that Jonah's heart was still hard while he was in the water. It was probably hard for quite some time, as he struggled to survive. Not until the very end did Jonah pray. But, his prayer came to the LORD. It arrived in God's holy temple. And he answered quickly by rescuing him through the fish.

Oh, how easy is it for us to be like Jonah. How often we wait until we have exhausted every last resource that we turn to the LORD in prayer. It's when the last dollar is in the bank account that we really pray for financial provision. It's only when the pregnancy shows warning signs that we really pray. It's only after the car crash that we pray. It's only when the marriage turns sour that we pray. It's only when we are totally confused about the future that we pray. Oh, let's not be like Jonah. Let's pray early and often.

Let's look at our last point this morning, ...

4. Promise (verses 8-9).

"Those who regard vain idols forsake their faithfulness, but I will sacrifice to You with the voice of thanksgiving That which I have vowed I will pay. Salvation is from the LORD."

It's amazing that Jonah would make such an observation from the stomach of a fish. But, he knew that no idol could save him like this. Each of the sailors on the ship were calling out to their own gods, which were nothing more than idols (1:5). But, an idol can't bring a storm upon the sea (1:4). And an idol can't direct the lot (1:7). And an idol can't calm the storm (1:15). And an idol can't save from the heart of the seas (2:3). But, the LORD of heaven and earth can (1:9). And Jonah knows this all too well. And so, Jonah pledges his obedience. He will be thankful, "I will sacrifice to You with the voice of thanksgiving." He will be faithful, "that which I have vowed, I will pay."

Jonah's prayer is like many prayers that are prayed in desperation. "Lord, if you save me, I'll promise to be at church every Sunday!" "Lord, if you save me, I'll tell others of how you have saved me." "Lord, if you save me, I'll be a missionary" That was Jonah's prayer. "I'll go." He fulfilled his vow and went to Nineveh. (3:3)

Then comes the key phrase in all of Jonah's Psalm, "Salvation is from the LORD" (verse 9).

Jonah knew that his salvation came from the LORD. Jonah knew that he didn't save himself from the seas. Jonah knew that he had done everything wrong. But, it was the LORD who had saved him. And the same is true for us as well. If you know the Lord, Jesus Christ, if you have been saved from your sin, you know that you didn't do it yourself. Would the truth be known, you were a bit like Jonah. You did the running away. But, God did the saving.

The Bible says that God saved us when we were yet sinners (Rom. 5:8). It was when we were God's enemies that He reconciled us to Himself (Rom. 5:10). Jonah is a great picture of all of us. For, we all have sinned. "But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)" (Eph. 2:4-5). "He saved us, not on the basis of deed which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit" (Titus 3:5). God is the one who does the saving. Salvation is from the LORD. It can well be argued that this little phrase summarizes the entire theme of the Bible.

My father recently gave me a book entitled, "Salvation Belongs to Our God," by Christopher Wright. He read it and said, "Steve, this would be a good book for you to read." (He does this often with me, far beyond what I can actually ever read). Anyway, in the first chapter of this book, we read, ...

The Bible ends with a climactic final chorus. The whole creation will sing it, and it sums up the message of the whole Bible story. ... It is not a long song, but it sums up a very long story. It is a song we will not want to get out of our heads, or our hearts, for all eternity. Hear it is from John's vision in Revelation 7:9-10:

After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb."

What would have been in the mind of someone who wrote and sang, 'Salvation belongs to our God'? What we discover when we track the vocabulary through the Bible is that it has a very broad and comprehensive range of significance--in both Old and New Testaments. The statement, 'God saves' covers a huge range of realities, situations and experiences. And the reason for this is the immense variety of circumstances in which God's saving engagement with people takes place through the great sweep of biblical history. The fact is, we human beings need a lot of saving. And God does a lot of saving in the Bible. [\[8\]](#)

Think about that last phrase, we human beings need a lot of saving. And God does a lot of saving in the Bible. How true that is!

However you say it, "Salvation belongs to our God" (Revelation 7:10) or "Salvation comes from the LORD" (Jonah 2:9). It doesn't much matter. The truth is that God is the author of our salvation. God is the worker of our salvation. God is the owner of our salvation. Oh, may we never forget this. And yet, how easy is it to forget.

On the outside of my office door, I have little art project that one of my children made for me. It's a little tile of some type. On the back of it are some magnets that allow it to stick to my metal door. It says simply, "Salvation comes from the Lord" (Jonah 2:9). On the back of it, it reads, "Carissa Brandon, 6/12/03." My daughter made it almost six years ago and it has been on my door since about that time. I see it every time I enter my office, which is in my home. I figure that I probably enter go in and out of my office on an average of 10 times per day. If you calculate that out over 6 years, you will discover that I have looked at this thing more than 20,000 times. And yet, I hardly see this little piece of art anymore.

The same can take place regarding the main story line of the Bible. We can read it and read it and read it, and still miss the main point of it all. The Bible is the story of redemption. The Bible is a story of how God saves sinners through Jesus Christ.

I want to close my message this morning by looking at Matthew 12, where Jesus mentions Jonah in the stomach of the fish. "A demon-

possessed man who was blind and mute was brought to Jesus, and He leased him, sot that the mute man spoke and saw" (Matt. 12:22). The crowd saw this and were amazed, thinking that perhaps Jesus was the Christ (12:23). But, the scribes and Pharisees attributed the miraculous power of Jesus to demons. Jesus then rebuked those who didn't believe.

We pick the story up in verse 38, "Then some of the scribes and Pharisees said to Him, 'Teacher, we want to see a sign from You.'" (As if the miracles that Jesus had worked all throughout His ministry were not enough. As if the miracle just done before their eyes was not enough). Jesus then answered and said to them, "An evil and adulterous generation craves for a sign; and yet no sign will be given to it but the sign of Jonah the prophet; for just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the sea monster, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth" (Matthew 12:39-40).

Why was Jesus there in the heart of the earth? Here are ten reasons.

1. He was there because He was crucified according to God's plan (Acts 4:28).
2. He was there because he had paid for our sins by dying upon the cross as a sacrifice (Galatians 3:13).
3. He was there because God forsook Him upon the cross, so that He might not forsake us (Matthew 27:46).
4. He was there because He didn't open His mouth, but became as a lamb led to slaughter (Isaiah 53:7).
5. He was there because He chose not to save Himself, so that He could save others (Matthew 27:42).
6. He was there that He might taste death for us (Hebrews 2:9).
7. He was there because He showed His love to us in laying down His life for His friends (John 15:13).
8. He was there to fulfill prophesy that the Son of Man would suffer and die for the sins of His people (Mark 10:33-34).
9. He was there to inaugurate the New Covenant through His blood (Luke 22:20).
10. He was there that we might enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus (Hebrews 10:19).

The good news is this: God didn't abandon His soul to Sheol. God didn't allow Jesus to undergo decay (Ps. 16:10). Instead, God raised Him up on the third day, according to the Scriptures. In raising up Christ, we have hope of eternal life through faith in Him. It was all God's mercy. We need to remember these things.

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on March 8, 2009 by Steve Brandon.
For more information see www.rvbc.cc.

[1] The original idea for this illustration came from a sermon preached by Joshua Harris on July 11, 2004 at Covenant Life Church in Gaithersburg, Maryland.

[2] The answer to the question is B.

[3] The answer to the question is B.

[4] The answer to the question is A.

[5] I found this story at <http://www.angelfire.com/mi/dinosaurs/jonah.html>.

[6] This is a good sight that talks about this story: <http://www.truthorfiction.com/rumors/n/newjonah.htm>.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Christopher Wright, "Salvation Belongs to Our God," pp. 15-16.