

Sermon 2nd August 2020

I have a question “How is your salvation doing, are you feeling saved or are you a bit unsure?” This morning we are going to look at the idea that God is our salvation and how Jonah experienced this great truth. You may ask, why is this relevant to us here this morning, why is this relevant to me. Because understanding that God is our salvation directly addresses many of fears and concerns that we have about our salvation. Understanding that God is my salvation directly addresses our fear we are not good enough for God to save, it addresses our fear that if we get it wrong God will reject us, it addresses our confusion about how God deals with us when we do get it wrong and sin and it demolishes the belief that our salvation is all about me and my efforts. This morning thought could be titled “God doesn’t give up on me”.

Your name means something. All names have meanings and sometimes they express something about who we are. Here are a just a few examples of what some of your names mean. Anne comes from the Hebrew name Hannah and means “grace” or “favour”, Gillian means “youthful” or “downy”, Andy a diminutive of Andrew means “manlike” or “brave”, Keith means “from the forest” or “from the battleground”. Now, perhaps for us the reality of who we are doesn’t line up with what our name means. However, in the Bible names are far more important, nearly always expressing some inner quality or characteristic of the person. Names in the Bible are little pictures of who the person is. For example, Israel means wrestle with God or contend with God. In the Old Testament, Israel who was formerly named Jacob who wrestled with an angel hence earning his name change to Israel. We can also think of Simon whose name Jesus changed to Peter, meaning the rock. Jesus said “*And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock, I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.*” Of course Peter didn’t always live up to his name, did he?

God has numerous names in the Bible and all them describe some particular characteristic He has. Unlike Peter and us God always lives up to His name. The name of God we are thinking about this morning is *Elohei yeshu’at*. Jonah draws on this version of God’s name when he proclaims in 2:9 “*Salvation comes from the Lord*”. Jonah is acknowledging, from in the belly of the great fish that there is absolutely

nothing he can do to save himself and his salvation is solely dependent on God alone. God is the one who literally saves Jonah.

Before we look at chapter four, we need to be very aware of the context, of what has just happened in chapter three as it set the backdrop to all that is to unfold. The Ninevites had repented, not just a handful that we would be ecstatic about but the whole population of Nineveh. What's more the Assyrian King himself had repented in the dust and turned to God's mercy verse 9 "*Who knows God may yet relent and with compassion turn from His fierce anger so that we will not perish.*" This the most successful evangelical crusade recorded anywhere in the Bible an entire city has repented and been saved. God had moved in power and strength through the message He gave Jonah and brought the great city of Nineveh to repentance.

Now you would think that Jonah would have been happy, but no, to put it mildly he was absolutely furious, verse one "*But Jonah was greatly displeased and became angry.*" Jonah then proceeds to criticise God for being gracious, compassionate, slow to anger, abounding in love and relenting from sending calamity. It appears that Jonah has lost his mind. The text call this rant a prayer which I suppose it is, as prayer is talking to God and Jonah is at least talking honestly about how he feels to God. Jonah then finishes his rant by asking God to kill him. How does God deal with this ranting, furious and death wishing prophet? Does God ignore Jonah - no, dose God argue with Jonah - no, dose God put Jonah in his place - no, does God strike Jonah dead – no God doesn't do any of these things. God deal with Jonah's rantings by asking him a question. A gentle and compassionate request for Jonah to think about what he is saying. There is nothing in Jonah's behaviour that merits God's compassionate and forgiving response to him. What Jonah actually deserves is at the very least a good dose of divine punishment or probably death. Here we see God's determination to save His errant prophet despite all that Jonah has done wrong not because of any good he has done. God doesn't treat Jonah as he deserves, he treats Jonah with compassion and forgiveness.

God treats us in the same way, in His mercy he chooses to save those who don't deserve salvation. No-one deserves to be saved, Jonah the rebellious, uncaring and death wishing prophet certainly didn't deserve to be saved by God from drowning,

Jonah actually deserved to die. The Ninevites were a murderous and savage people who delighted in torture and mutilation of women and children and were plotting against God, they deserved to be destroyed. Salvation is an undeserved gift from God for those who will accept it. God will never be obligated to save someone because they were good enough to earn salvation. Salvation starts with God and His desire to save you as you are, salvation has nothing to do with you being good enough for God. Salvation begins with God's sovereign choice to lavish His love on you. It is utterly amazing that God chooses to save both those who do not know Him and those who are His enemies, simply because He loves them.

So, what does our errant prophet do next well Jonah does what Jonah does best he walks away from God. Jonah leaves the city and settles down, a safe distance away to wait to see what going to happen to Nineveh. This is again a senseless thing he is doing after the rant he has just had about God's forgiveness and compassion he still hopes or expects that God will destroy Nineveh. He even makes himself comfy building a shelter. How does God respond to Jonah continued disobedience? Does God ignore Jonah - no, does God argue with Jonah - no, does God put Jonah in his place - no, does God strike Jonah dead – no God doesn't do any of these things we would do or we would reasonably expect God to do. God deals with Jonah's sin by providing a vine to give Jonah extra shade, this makes Jonah very happy indeed. Then he sends a worm to kill the vine and remove the shade He had provided. Then God sent a hot easterly wind and that didn't go down well with Jonah and once again he returns to his favourite topic, "It would be better for me to die than to live". So why did God send the weed, the worm and the wind because He hadn't abandoned His decision to save Jonah. Despite Jonah's disobedience God was still determined to save him. Despite Jonah's disobedience and sin God didn't give up on him, nor does God give up on us because we are disobedient and sinful. God will continue to work in our lives to call us back to him, to repent. This raises a question why is God so committed to saving Jonah to saving us? The answer is simple because God loves Jonah and us and in His love for us He determines to save us and chooses not to give up on us .

Before we move on let's take a moment to look at why God dealt with Jonah as He did. Despite God initially providing the vine for more shade he takes it away and actually brings a searing wind to make Jonah's situation worse. Why does God do

this, well simply to challenge Jonah sin, to challenge Jonah's uncaring and unforgiving heart towards the Ninevites. God loves the sinner so much He will challenge their sin, sometime very directly and in ways we wouldn't expect or appreciate. God love for us is so profound that He isn't willing to let our sin stain and ruin our lives. God was determined to challenge Jonah's sin, that is Jonah's racist and uncaring heart attitude towards the Ninevites.

After sending the wind God ask a similar question to that he asked after Jonah's rant in verse 2, "Do you have a right to be angry about the vine?". Then despite Jonah's protestations about his right to be so angry he could die God brings Jonah to the heart of the problem, that is Jonah's heart attitude towards the Ninevites. God in effects say you care so much about the vine that gave you shade but do not care for 120,000 soul lost is sin living in Nineveh. You don't even care about the animals that would perish if Nineveh were to be destroyed. Here is the crux of the book of Jonah the comparison between God who cares deeply for those lost in their sins and acts to save them and Jonah who care for nothing for those lost in their sin and refuses to act to save them.

Finally, how God works to save Jonah lays bare the great lie that salvation is about our efforts or our works or our goodness or anything else that we think we need add to God's saving work. Salvation is all about God from beginning to end. Jonah understood in the belly of the great fish that God alone was *Elohei yeshu'at* that is God his salvation. We to need to understand that God is *Elohei yeshu'at* that is the God our salvation. When we understand this, we can stop fearing about our salvation, stop worrying that God will withdraw his salvation because we sin, stop depending on our own efforts to save ourselves. When we understand that God is *Elohei yeshu'at* we can be sure and certain that God will never give up on us and our salvation is secure in Him. I started this morning by asking you a question, "How is your salvation doing, are you feeling saved or are you a bit unsure?" After hearing that God is your salvation and how he dealt with Jonah has your answer changed?

We started with looking at names, can you guess what Jesus name means? The name Jesus is derived from the Hebrew name Yeshua, meaning "to deliver; to rescue; to save" Note the similarity of Jesus Hebrew name, Yeshua and the second part of God's name yeshu'at. Both share the common meaning to save. Jesus is the

continuation and culmination of God seeking to save those who are lost. Jesus was sent like Jonah to call sinners to repent but unlike Jonah he was obedient, obedient even to death on the cross. God's love, compassion and forgiveness for those lost in their sin led Him to send his Son to die on the cross some 500 years later. Jesus death on the cross is the testament to God's determination to save the sinner, to save you and me.

I leave you with God's great Mission statement that is the golden thread that ties the whole Bible together. **John 3:16** *"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."*