

Jonah 1:17-2:10 – A Prayer of Rescue or Repentance

I am almost certain that all of us have found ourselves in what appears to be a hopeless situation. In fact, you might be in one as you read this. Perhaps these times of hopelessness are simply a result of a world broken by sin. Maybe your hopelessness is connected to the affects of another's sin. However, there are times in which we feel hopeless as a result of our own sins. It's in these times that we don't only need rescue, but a rescue only found in repentance.

In Jonah 1:17-2:10 we see a beautiful picture of God's deliverance and rescue. The passage begins with God's provision of a great fish to swallow Jonah in order to prevent his certain drowning and concludes with Jonah being brought back to land. Sandwiched in between these two actions are Jonah's prayer in his underwater tomb.

I must admit that I have deeply wrestled with this passage as I consider Jonah's words, his prior actions, and his heart motives exposed at the end of the book. My critical nature makes me question Jonah's words, what they expose about his heart, and how I think they should affect his life moving forward. In doing so, I miss what is most important about this passage. These words, regardless of the motivation behind them, are a beautiful reflection of Christ our rescuer.

Jonah's prayer reveals a clear understanding of God's rescue and deliverance. His words reflect an understanding that God listens, He directs, He delivers, and He saves. Jesus' prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane reflects these same truths. Jesus approaches His Father with a clear understanding that He hears Him. Yet, God clearly directs Him to remain faithful to death on a cross. In doing so, Jesus trusts that His Father will deliver Him from death. As a result of Christ's faithfulness, not only is He saved from eternal death, but He now offers us complete salvation through His life, death, and resurrection.

Because of Christ's faithfulness we are able to approach our Heavenly Father with the same assurance that He will deliver us. However, this deliverance is not always a situational deliverance, but it is always spiritual deliverance. I believe Jonah has not fully understood this truth. While he understands God's rescue, he misses an opportunity to repent of his specific sins and experience a spiritual rescue that radically transforms our hearts.

In Psalm 51 David cries out to God in repentance. When comparing David and Jonah's prayers there is a clear difference in their conversations with God. Again, both reflect beautiful truths of God, but one appears to show a clear personal response to the rescue that God's grace provides. David's heart is broken over his sin in the sight of a holy God. He's willing to accept the consequences of His actions but believes that the Lord will continue to be gracious toward him even in discipline. He recognizes that it is his heart that needs rescue and transformation. As a result of this transformation David declares he will teach God's ways, call others to repentance, sing of God's righteousness, declare praise, and make sacrifices of the heart. Repentance allows us to declare the wonders of God's grace. When we experience this grace we cannot help but shout it from the mountains. Jonah's prayer reflects a lack of full understanding of God's grace, a grace that delivers spiritually. Sadly, we will see that Jonah continues to struggle with God's grace and desire to save even the worst of us. I challenge all of us to pray prayers of both rescue and repentance as we experience the brokenness of this world and our sinful hearts. We have a God who listens, loves, and rescues through His abundant grace.

Discussion Questions:

- 1) What are some truths about God that Jonah mentions in his prayer? What are some truths about God that David mentions in Psalm 51?
- 2) How are these two prayers different? How is David's more personal?
- 3) When we fully recognize all that we've received in Christ, how are you encouraged in that freedom to fully repent of your sins? How do you still struggle in repentance?