

Salvation is from the Lord, *pt. 2*

Jon. 2:9c

In our previous study of Jonah's confession of faith from the stomach of the fish, we saw that God is sovereign when it comes to a person's salvation; that He is its author and finisher. For Jonah declared: 'Salvation is *from the Lord*.' Just as God is the sovereign Creator and Governor of the *first* creation, so also is He of the *second* creation. Just as He created and sustains the first creation by His sovereign *word*, so He does with the second creation by Jesus' *gospel*.

There is a great need, then, to get the gospel right. If as the apostle said, it is that 'by which we are saved' (*1 Cor. 15:2*), and we are warned of 'receiving one different *from*, or contrary *to* what we have received' (*Gal. 1:6, 9*), then we must give careful attention to it. (It is sad, and in some sense tragic, that many who name the name of Christ in this generation do not really understand the gospel, nor care to. They do not really study it. They do not think according to it. In some cases it would seem that many a preacher is even ashamed of it.) But what Jonah affirmed inside the fish is as clear as if he spoke the gospel into our own ears: '*Salvation is from the Lord*.'

Now these words of Jonah - 'salvation', and that it is 'from the Lord' (and *from* or *with* no other) - these provide the basis for the second part of our preaching series.

We are here unfolding a biblical logic. We necessarily began last time with a sovereign God who as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit respectively appoints, accomplishes, and applies salvation to a sinner. Now we look at man for who *he* is before this God; who *we ourselves* are before God. God is *sovereign*; and so, He *is* the Savior. Man, however, is *sinful*; and so, he *needs* the Savior. If salvation is from the Lord, then man is in need of that salvation. And what makes him needy before God is sin.

And Jonah saw *himself* as that needy sinner, and the *Lord* as that sovereign Savior. He affirmed that *God* (and not Mother Nature) sent the storm (1:4), that *God* (and not simply the sailors) cast him into the Sea (2:3), that the waves of *God* (and not simply the Mediterranean) sunk and humbled him further (2:3), and that *God* (and not any person - including Jonah) was behind his being rescued from the Mediterranean Sea, its weeds, and its fish. But more importantly, God was behind Jonah's rescue from the guilt, the penalty, and everlasting punishment *for sin* in Sheol. And though he was quickly sinking there while trying to flee from the Lord, the Lord found him, took him in, and saved him. So Jonah says, 'Salvation is from the Lord' (2:9). 'Where sin abounds, grace super-abounds.' God sovereignly and graciously rescued sinning and needy Jonah.

But He did so *after* Jonah saw and came to terms with his sinfulness before a holy God. It was *in connection with this* that God saved Jonah.

And so that grace might super-abound to *you* today, we need to consider that in man - in *us* - *sin* abounds. (You do great harm to your soul, friend, and deceive yourself, if you too quickly settle on the truth that *grace* abounds without having first known that *sin* abounds in yourself. Indeed, does such a person *understand* grace, or even *need* grace? Surely if sin is not seen as exceedingly sinful, then how can grace be exceedingly lovely, or even relevant?)

So let us see:

I. Who man *was* but now *is*.

When Solomon searched high and low for the meaning of life, he made this conclusion; and it is as profound as it is honest: 'I have seen only this, that God made men upright, but they have sought out many schemes' (*Ecc.* 7:29). To 'seek many schemes' is to be fallen, and to be 'made upright' is to be without scheming. *Man once was upright in righteousness; but now he is fallen and sinful.* So teach Moses and the apostle

Paul. From Moses it was the unfolding genealogy of the human race, for each being said ‘...and he died’ just as God said to Adam if he sinned. For Paul it was that ‘through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sinned, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned...even over those who had not sinned in the likeness of Adam’ (*Gen.* 2:17; 5:3; *Rom.* 5:12,14)

Man, once a citizen of Eden with all its lush gardens, colors, fragrances, beauty, and sounds of innocence, was once upright and without sin. He stood with righteousness and integrity toward God. Now he is crooked. He is not straight. He is fallen and bowed in a different direction. No longer does his uprightness make for him to see God and *heavenly* things; but his crookedness makes for him to see the things of the *earth*, where God has made the curse for sin to rest. And being hunched over toward this, he schemes to use it all against God and for himself. ‘I have seen only this, that God made men upright, but they have sought out many schemes’ (*Ecc.* 7:29).

But more, *man was once alive in righteousness; now he is dead in sins*, as we have read Paul saying (*Eph.* 2:1). Every person, as a descendant of Adam, is not merely *diseased* by sin, nor *disabled* by sin. Neither is he *drowning* in sin or *dying* in sin. It is more severe and worse than this: He is *dead* in sin. There is *no* spiritual life; but sin has a death-grip hold on every person, just as a coffin’s bottom, sides, and lid has on its corpse. As the coffin surrounds the corpse, so sin surrounds the sinner. He is dead *in* it. He is *in* its sphere, just as Jonah was *in* the Sea with its weeds wrapped *around* his head.

The Bible teaches that you *are* such a sinner. It is not just that you *commit* sins. It is that you *are* a sinner. It tells you about your condition - who you are, and what you are really like. All your sins - as many as they are, and as often as you commit them - all come from a person who *is* a sinner. Your sin is not merely *outside you*; it is *inside you*.

And this is precisely what the apostle Paul has taught at Ephesians 2. He notes that a person dead in trespasses and sins walks ‘according to the course of this world,

according to the prince of the power of the air' (which is Satan). But it's more than actions on the *outside*. It's about desires and thoughts on the *inside*. Such a person lives 'in the *lusts* of the flesh (the sinful nature), indulging the *desires* of the flesh *and of the mind*, and [is] *by nature* a child of wrath' (v. 3). So David says, 'Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and *in sin my mother conceived me*' (*Psa.* 51:5). And again, 'The wicked are estranged [from God] *from the womb*; these who speak lies go astray *from birth*' (*Psa.* 58:3). As Isaiah said of Israel, we too, are 'a rebel *from birth*' (*Isa.* 48:8). Sin has to do with our nature inherited and passed on from Adam.

So then, since sin has to do with our *nature*, it has to do with our *inside*. '*Out of the heart* come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders' (*Matt.* 15:19). 'The fool says in his *heart*, "There is no God."' (*Psa.* 14:1). 'The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.' (*Gen.* 6:5) Wow! Not only is the heart of the issue an issue of the heart, but notice the pointed emphasis: '*every* intent (and not some, or even many) - *every* intent of the thoughts of his heart'... '*only* evil *continually*.' Not '*partially* evil *occasionally*'; but '*only* evil *continually*'. That is not a pretty picture of man; but that *is* the way God sees every person, including you, including me. It's not only our heart in general, but the heart's *intents*, *thoughts*, and *evil* character.

We sin because our *nature* is now sinful. From our sinful nature come our sinful actions. Just as the sparks of a fire go upward, so too man who, as Job says, is 'born for trouble' (*Job* 5:7) Just as a bad tree bears bad fruit, so we as sinners sin with all our hearts.

Thus the term 'total depravity'. It does not mean that every person is as sinful as he *could* be, nor that sin affects every person in *identical degrees*, so that if we compared them all they would be indistinguishable. (No, the rapist, the murderer, the kidnapper, and the homosexual manifest a greater degree of corruption than the atheist who volunteers for the Red Cross and works with Habitat for Humanity.) It means that the

fullness of a person - mind, emotions, will, desires, affections, motivations, and purposes - the totality of a person is tainted by sin. We are sinful in every aspect of ourselves.

So with these things we learn *who* every person now *is*, and *what* every person now is *like*, having fallen into sin and ruin on account of Adam. All are sinners.

But these things, as vital to understand as they are, are only an introduction to the rest of a person, on which the Scripture places a great emphasis. So we see:

II. What man now *does* do, *can* only do, and so *will* only do on the one hand, and yet what he *does not* do, *cannot* do, and so *will not* do on the other.

Man *does* sin; he *can only* do sin; and so *will only* do sin. He *does not do* what is right. He *cannot do* what is morally right. He *will not do* what is morally right. These things the Scripture teaches in an alarming, in an unnerving, in a brutally honest way. It doesn't hold back. Why? So that you and I would in no way minimize, trivialize, or relativize our spiritual condition. Otherwise we will never come to sense our neediness before God. And we would not be alarmed enough to see or care that grace abounds, or less, *seek* that grace that abounds more than our abounding sins.

So from the very beginning, God tells us (though he *asks* us), 'What is this you have *done*?' (*Gen.* 3:13). 'Go ahead; will you see it and call it what it is? Can you be honest to God? What is this you have done?' So, from this first 'doing' comes the origin of all other deeds and doings of man: 'There is no one who does what is good.' (*Psa.* 14:2-3; *Rom.* 3:11). 'Do you indeed speak righteousness? Do you judge uprightly, O sons of men?' (*Psa.* 58:1) 'They do not know how to do what is right' (*Amos* 3:10). 'Whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin' (*Jam.* 4:17).

Martin Luther illustrated the effects of original sin very well. He said 'Original sin is in us like our beard. We are shaved today and look clean. Tomorrow our beard has grown again, nor does it cease growing while we remain upon the earth.'

And so what God asked with penetrating conviction remains today: ‘What is this you have done?’

But we move slightly deeper, and see that there is more than what a person *does* (or does *not* do) before God. What is more alarming, and more convicting, is what a person now *cannot* do. He cannot *not* sin. And again, the scripture emphasizes this: ‘A natural man *does not* accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he *cannot* understand them, because they are spiritually appraised’ (1 Cor. 2:14). ‘A good tree *cannot* produce bad fruit, *nor can* a bad tree produce good fruit’ (Matt. 7:18). ‘*Can* the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? *Then you also can do good* who are accustomed to doing evil.’ (Jer. 13:23). ‘Who *can* make the clean out of the unclean? No one!’ (Job 14:4). ‘*No one can come to Me* unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day.... *No one can come to Me* unless it has been granted him from the Father.’ (John 6:44, 65). ‘Why *do you not* understand what I am saying? It is because you *cannot* hear My word.’ (John 8:43). ‘While we were still *helpless*, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.’ (Rom. 5:6). ‘The mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it *does not* subject itself to the law of God, *for it is not even able*; and those who are in the flesh *cannot* please God.’ (Rom. 8:7-8). Thus, as Jesus clearly said, and as we will take up in another study, ‘Unless one is born again he *cannot* see the kingdom of God...Unless one is born of water and the Spirit he *cannot* enter into the kingdom of God.’ (John 3:3,5)

In all these statements, it is not just that man *does not* do what is pleasing to God; but that he *cannot* do what is pleasing to God. He *does not*, because he *cannot*. He *must*, but he *cannot*. *So, he is trapped.*

And this is why the Scripture speaks of man as a slave to sin. He is *bound* by it, and under not only its *influence*, but more, its *power*. ‘We know that the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.’ (1 John 5:19) As Jesus said, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you,

everyone who commits sin is the *slave* of sin' (*John* 8:34). And Paul of all believers before they were born again 'You were *slaves* of sin' (*Rom.* 6:16) and 'enslaved to various lusts and pleasures' (*Tit.* 3:3), and 'having been *held captive* by [the devil] to do his will' (*2 Tim.* 2:26; cf. *Acts* 26:17-18; *Col.* 1:13).

And this is what is so lamentable about one's condition: He is bound to sin as a slave to his tyranny. The sinner *cannot* break free.

But worse - far worse, because it adds to his guilt - the sinner, unlike the common slave, *prefers* (even *loves*), and so, chooses, his slavery. (This is what Augustine saw about himself that led him to come to an end of *himself* before He was humbled before *Christ*: he loved the sin that enslaved him, and would in the end kill him.)

So we go a step deeper in the Bible's teaching: a person not only *does not* do what pleases God, *nor can do* what pleases God, but therefore *will not* do what pleases God. 'Jerusalem, Jerusalem...How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and *you were unwilling.*' (*Matt.* 23:37) There was the Savior healing diseases, teaching truth, doing good, having mercy, showing grace, and yet in the face of that, 'you were unwilling'! Jesus said to the religious leaders of the Scriptures, 'these testify about Me; and *you are unwilling* to come to Me so that you may have life.' (*John* 5:39-40). (And this is why - as we will consider in another study - '*it does not depend on the man who wills* or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy.' (*Rom.* 9:16; cf. *John* 1:12-13])

Jesus teaches that a sinner's will is *not free*, but *bound*. To say that a person is sinful, but has an aspect of his person (in this case, the will) that is not affected by sin, is not only to disagree with the Bible, it is to speak utter nonsense.

If one touched leprosy under the old covenant, would it make *only* his fingertip unclean? (No. He as an entire person would be regarded unclean by God.)

If dirt is poured into a glass of water, is it dirty water? Or is just *some* of it dirty?

If the Bible says that sin characterizes a person's heart, is the person sinful? Or is just *some* of him sinful? (If I plopped slimy mud into a glass of water, stirred it even a bit, and then gave it to you to drink, would you drink only one *side* of the water, or the ½ inch section in the *middle*? Would you drink *any* of it? *No*. Then why would you say that man is a sinner - *all except for his will*? To say that his actions are sinful, and that his mind is sinful, but that his will is unaffected by sin, is like saying that only a portion of the water is affected by the mud.)

No, if we hear what Paul is saying at the beginning of Ephesians 2, then we see man (and ourselves *in* our sin, and *apart* from Christ) as a spiritual *corpse*. Can a corpse do anything to improve its condition? Can it respond to the gospel with some power in itself? So will it choose to? *Never*. In that a person's spiritual nature is dead in trespasses and sins it can no more do anything spiritual good toward God as a corpse can sit up in a coffin and play the harmonica.

The common assumption at work in far too many people is that man is in some way morally neutral; that he is not fully set against God, nor is he fully under the influence of Satan; that he is a moral island to himself. But this is clearly wrong under the guiding light of the Scripture. Man is no longer upright but *fallen*, no longer spiritually alive but spiritually *dead* in sin. Therefore he *does* sin. He *cannot* do any other. He has *no* 'free' will to choose what is pleasing in God's sight. He can choose only between more or less forms of evil because that *is* what his nature *is*. Even his outwardly righteous works are tainted with sin, unbelief, self-merit, and an appalling absence of conscious love for God that even *they* are unacceptable to God.

Let us take a person on his (or her) best day... Even still, this is what Isaiah says toward God: 'All our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment' (*Isa.* 64:6). Let that sink in. 'All our *righteous* deeds - never mind our sins! - are like a filthy garment.' 'All (not some) of our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment.' (Would you dress yourself for

a dinner banquet in the rags you just used to wipe down the garage floor? Then why would you put forth your righteous works in the sight of God? They are filthy rags.)

But we move on to:

III. What God does for sinners - not in any way because of *them*, but because of *who He is*.

Here again is the sovereignty of God in matters of salvation. Salvation is *from* the Lord because it is *for* the Lord. Feast your eyes for a moment at *Eph. 2:1-5* again, and whet your appetite for the coming weeks:

And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, ² in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. ³ Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest. ⁴ *But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us,* ⁵ even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (*by grace you have been saved*).

...grace that super-abounds over sin that once abounded.

Do not lower God's glorious grace to in any way be a *mere response* to a poor, needy sinner such as yourself. His salvation is *not because of you*, but *because of Him*. It is on account of *His mercy*, and His *richness* in it, and because of *His love*, and the *greatness* of it, that He loves a sinner as He does to have sent Christ as such a Savior to die and rise again.

If you conceive of it any other way, then friend, you're still too full *of yourself*.

So we ought to confess with Jonah that 'Salvation is from the Lord.' We ought to do this with a gratitude that correlates to being in the very realm of death without any ability on our part to escape it. We ought to do this with a high sense of privilege.

Such is the teaching of the Bible. And it's not just so 'in the abstract' or in some 'mere academic context' that is removed from human experience. No! It has everything to do with you and your situation.

Use #1. Without a true and full conviction that 'salvation is *from the Lord*' - sovereignly, only, and always - one will only yield to some confidence in the flesh: an inner, though unseen and unconfessed, pride: 'I am not *too* fallen, nor am I *too* sinful, that I cannot do *something* toward my salvation, even if it's to get God started on it all by making some sort of decision of believing or choice of faith.'

But by this, one does not agree with Jonah, that 'salvation is from the Lord' in such a way that salvation is *entirely and only* from the Lord *without anything from us*, as Jonah clearly affirms.

All this is a way of saying, 'God, You are not as sovereign, nor is Your grace as abounding, as You say it is.' And again, you would never *say* this about yourself, but it is true, that you are *proud*. You think more highly of yourself than you ought. You're presumptive before the holy God, similar to the way Peter boldly held to error without being teachable before the Lord. If you do not agree with this teaching of the Bible, then friend, it must be said to you forthrightly, honestly, and lovingly, '*you have not yet considered your sin, or yourself in it, as you must.*'

The truth of this doctrine is useful to smash our pride and self-sufficiency. This doctrine forces us to agree with the Scripture that there is a real helplessness about ourselves before God - indeed deeper than we are inclined to think. Without it, there is no basis to mourn over and lament our condition. It is not really as bad as it could be, apparently! There is something we can still do that is good! In fact, it becomes that which occasions our being saved.

And the implication goes further in terms of your life professing Christ as your Savior: if you hold to the errors that sin does not hold you in its *complete* power, that it

has not *entirely* polluted you, that you are not fallen in terms of your *will*, and that you *can* actually choose good over against your nature, *then the pressure's on!!!* If you're going to start your Christian life presuming that it *begins* with you, then beware of all the anxiety that will come thinking that its continuing *depends* on you! The battles against remaining sin, and the doubts about blessed assurance, will deeply trouble you.

But Christ gives you *this* confidence: 'Salvation is from the Lord.'

Use #2. If sin has not affected man in all his parts and all his doings inwardly and outwardly, then is the gospel really 'good news'? Well, maybe it is, but it's not as good as it otherwise *could* be - indeed as much as the Bible *says* it is, and in the *way* that it is.

This doctrine rightly displaces *self*-esteem, then, and establishes (quite properly and necessarily) *God*-esteem. That God would think affectionately toward sinners! That God would not merely incline Himself, or offer Himself, toward sinners, but actually, fully, graciously, and sovereignly *save* sinners! It magnifies His name; as Paul said, 'to the praise of His glorious grace...to the praise of His glory...to the praise of His glory.' Glory to the *Father* for His grace! Glory to the *Son* for His grace! Glory to the *Spirit* for His grace! Glory to God in the *highest* for grace to man as the *lowest*; for 'Salvation is from the Lord.'

Preached at Messiah's Church (RPCNA)

Rev. Brian E. Coombs, March 8, 2009