

6/23 Salvation of Others

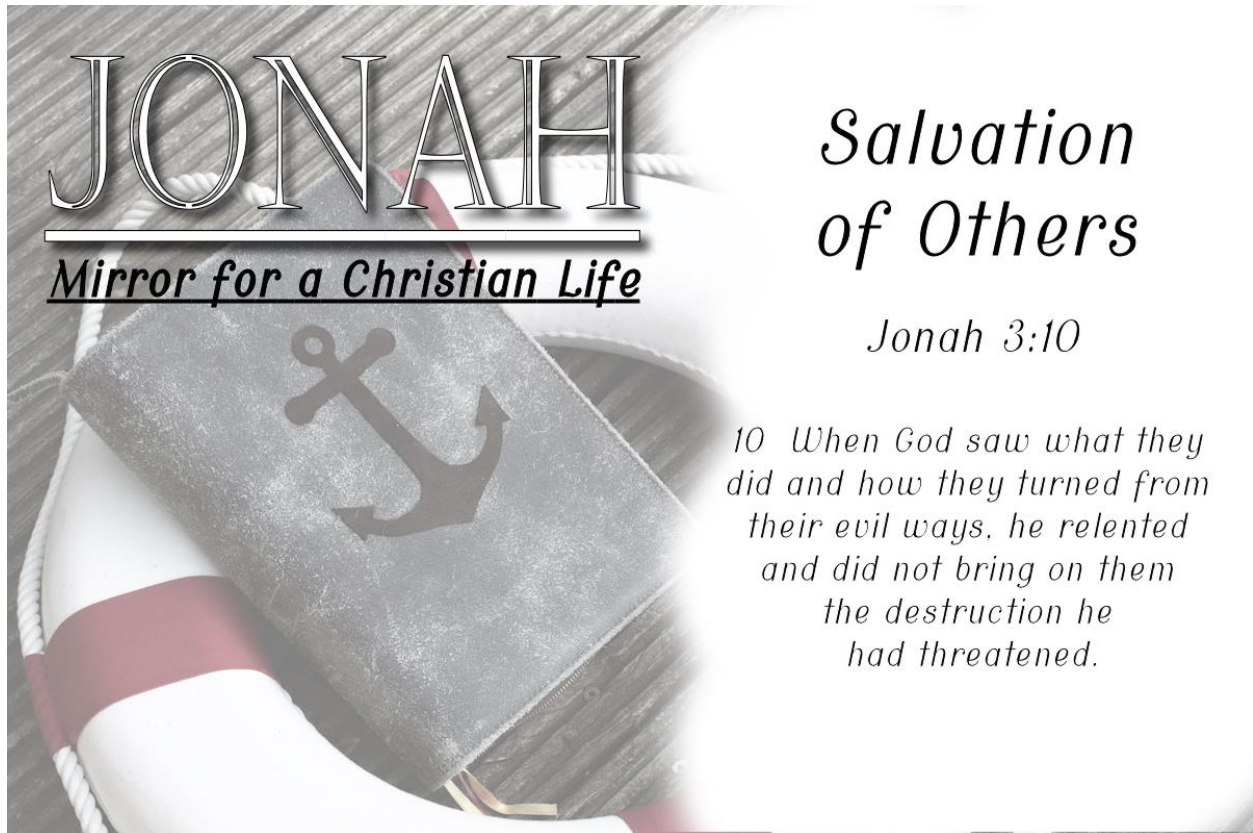
Jonah 3:10

10 When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he relented and did not bring on them the destruction he had threatened.

Special Music: "The Lord is My Salvation"

Keith and Kristy Getty

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NjOGX5zT8KU>



MYRON FINDS HIS PURPOSE

Myron felt that the air in the interrogation room was on the chilly side, but then that's the way it had been when he as been there with Max Sanders only a few months earlier. It seemed like ages ago. So much had happened. So much had changed. And this time he wasn't here under duress. This time he was here to serve as a conduit, a support system in a way, to help Speedy Appleton. How strange to see the roles change and reflect his new responsibilities to his community. The change had been good for Myron. He could see it in himself. Just eight weeks ago, he was sitting at the bus stop in the rain waiting for a bus that never did come, trying to escape his fate and his shame. He thought about how Sheriff Thom had pulled up instead of the bus he was waiting for, and how the sheriff had taken him back to town and placed him in a cell at the Sheriff's Department, which became his home for the next few weeks. And oh, how that time had been used to reshape his mind so that he could better understand the true natures of repentance and salvation.

Today, he sat here in this cold room with Speedy waiting for the moment when the sheriff would open the door. Sheriff Thom had been busy on a phone call when they had arrived, and Deputy Wagner had shown them to the interrogation room when Myron said they needed to speak with Sheriff Thom. Myron knew that this was a difficult time for Speedy, sitting in a hard chair and waiting, not knowing how this would all turn out. Time just seemed to drag along. It was a lot like waiting in Doc Adams' office for an appointment, only there

weren't any magazines to look at. Speedy nervously twiddled his thumbs and Myron knew that it would have been worse if Speedy hadn't come in voluntarily. If the circumstances had been revealed, Speedy might have been sitting here in handcuffs, which would have created an even greater anxiety to the moment.

Deputy Wagner opened the door, stepped back, making room for the sheriff to enter. "Would you boys like something to eat or drink?" offered Sheriff Thom. Both Myron and Speedy shook their heads. "Then that will be all, Deputy. I will let you know if we need anything." Deputy Wagner closed the door behind her as she left the room.

The Sheriff looked first at Myron and asked, "Why are you here, Myron? I know that Speedy needs to talk to me, but why did you come?"

Myron sat up straight and spoke, "Well, Sheriff, Speedy wanted me here. I am strictly here in a support role. Please tell me that it is alright for me to stay."

"Well, Myron, looks to me like you are doing what we brought you in to do, and your support for your friend is admirable. Considering the circumstances, I guess you can stay. But you aren't to speak. Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir. Thank you, sir" Myron replied.

"Okay, Speedy, I know you have something to tell me, but before you do, would you like for me to call your father? You are still a minor and you have every right to have him here with you. As a matter of fact, depending on what you are about to tell me, it would probably be best to let me give him a call."

Speedy looked up at the Sheriff and slowly responded, “No, sir. I don’t want him here. He would just keep me from saying what I need to say.”

“Now Speedy, let me reiterate, it would be in your best interest to have him here.”

“No, Sheriff. This is something I have to do on my own. This is my problem. My responsibility.”

“Okay, Speedy. But if I think you are about to put yourself in jeopardy, I will stop and give him a call. Is that understood?”

“Yes, sir, and I appreciate it,” said the young man.

“Okay, let’s hear it from the top, Speedy. What have you got to tell me?”

Speedy paused and looked away for a moment. After a few seconds, he turned to look the Sheriff in the eyes as he spoke. “Well, Sheriff, the fire over at Ms. Callaway’s wasn’t an accident. I’m sorry, that’s not what I meant. The fire was an accident, it’s just that it was accidentally started by me. I feel terrible about it. I ran away and didn’t tell anyone until I talked to Myron just a little while ago. He convinced me that I needed to come and talk to you.”

The Sheriff didn’t reply immediately. And when he did, it wasn’t what Speedy or Myron were expecting to hear. “I know, Speedy.”

“What? You know that I started the fire, or you knew that Myron was going to get me to come tell you about it. I didn’t even decide to tell you until I talked with Myron.”

“Both, Speedy. We know you set the fire, but we didn’t know if it was intentional or an accident. And I have come to know Myron well enough that I knew he would get you to come in.”

“How could you know I set the fire, Sheriff? No one was there. No one saw me! I was alone! You couldn’t have known.”

The sheriff looked at Speedy and shook his head. “Speedy, do you really think I don’t know how to do my job? We’ve known for several days. Your father knows, too. We were all hoping you would do the right thing and come tell us about it.”

“But how? I ...”

“The lighter you were playing with was your father’s. It’s monogrammed. It was a gift from your mother many years ago and was inscribed to him, from her. We knew that your dad didn’t set the fire, so there was really only one conclusion. I’m sure that if we take your fingerprints, they will match the ones we found on the lighter. It really didn’t take a lot of sleuthing on our part to figure it out. The hard part was waiting for you to admit to what you had done. Now, I talked with your father the other day and verified that it was his lighter. He wanted to take you to the woodshed right then and there, but I convinced him to give you time to own up to the accident.”

“Myron,” Speedy blubbered, “Did you know about this? Did you know that I had done it before you came to talk to me? I thought I could trust you! You’re just like everyone else!” Speedy became very agitated and angry.

“Myron didn’t know, Speedy. We didn’t tell him. But we were pretty sure that you would tell him when you called the office and asked him to meet you. Myron did the right thing by you. You would be hard-pressed to find someone who cares enough to do what he did.”

“Sheriff! It really was an accident. I didn’t mean to start the fire. I really didn’t. And I shouldn’t have run away. I know that. Please believe me.”

The Sheriff looked at the young man and spoke softly. “I know you didn’t mean to. You made a bad call. It happens to all of us at some point. But, like I am sure Myron told you, there are still repercussions to your negligence. Your dad promised to replace the shed and all the contents, but that really isn’t the entire answer. After talking with Judge Darling, we aren’t going to arrest you, but your dad is going to buy the materials for the shed and you are going to help build Ms. Callaway a newer, larger shed. You are also going to have to replace the contents yourself, so we will help you find a way to earn some money. Nobody is pressing charges and Ms. Callaway has been gracious enough to let us work this out. You owe her a big apology and your best effort on that shed.”

Speedy had a hard time believing what he was hearing. “I don’t know what to say, Sheriff. Thank you. And Myron, thank you as well. I really appreciate what you have both done.”

“Your dad is waiting out front, Speedy,” the Sheriff said. It would probably best to tell him everything before I give him a call this evening to let him know how everything went. You’re free to go.”

Speedy stood up and shuffled his way to the door like a guilty puppy. But things had gone better than either Speedy or Myron had anticipated thanks to the loving community of Parable. Sheriff Thom gave Myron a wink as he headed over to the dinner to help his mother with the evening crowd. It was obvious that he was proud of both boys.

When I was in high school, I had a good friend. We will call him Jim. Jim and I had a great deal in common, but truth be told, he was a great deal smarter than me. One of the things that we did not have in common was that I was a Christian and Jim was not. But he was curious about Christianity. He spent a great deal of time reading the Bible and was always constantly bringing me questions about what he had read, mostly regarding the legalism exemplified in the Old Testament versus the grace and mercy found in the New Testament. Many of his questions were like “Why does God do this here and do that other thing there?” I did my best to answer his questions but some of them were beyond me which would encourage me to seek advice from pastors and teachers on how to answer correctly. In so many ways, that was good for me. It stretched me. It helped me move beyond my own salvation experience into the meat of the message of Christ. It took me beyond appreciating how much God loved me and moved me towards God’s love for everyone.

But keeping up with Jim’s questions became quite time-consuming. There were times when I wanted to give up. None of the answers to Jim’s questions seemed to change his perspective on God, Jesus Christ, or the Holy Spirit. Jim had the heart and mind of a scientist and struggled with anything that didn’t fit into his logical connection with the physical universe. He had already made up his mind to become a doctor and was making plans for where he would do his pre-med and then his medical studies. He wanted to go to an Ivy League University and had the intelligence and self-discipline that would get him there. So, even though I was learning a great deal as I sought out answers for him,

those answers didn't seem to change his outlook on life or bring him any closer to embracing the love and teachings of Jesus. I began to feel like I was wasting my time. I couldn't see how anything I did or said was going to bring Jim any closer to repentance and salvation.

It was during the middle of all this that the Billy Graham Crusade came to Irving Texas. It was the very first event in Texas Stadium. The astroturf was still on the field in large rolls ready to be laid. I volunteered to work the crusade and it was a wonderful experience. My responsibility was to provide prayer and counseling to those who answered the invitation to repentance and chose to embrace the saving grace of Jesus at the end of the service. Being part of the crusade was both challenging and so very rewarding. Every night, as Billy Graham came to the invitation, I would get up from my seat and move onto the stadium floor to meet with new converts, answer their questions, pray, and rejoice with them.

I even got Jim to come to one of the nights of the crusade. Because of my involvement, I was unable to sit with him. But I had him sit with some of my Christian friends. I had no real expectation that anything would change with Jim, and I believed he came more out of curiosity than anything else. If you never had the opportunity to attend one of Billy Graham's Crusades, it is truly an awesome experience. But, in all the time I had been counseling with Jim, I had never seen him draw closer to understanding the truth of the presence of God, so why would hearing Mr. Graham's message make much of a difference? After Mr. Graham finished preaching, I moved onto the field like normal and I worked through the

moment with several people who had accepted the invitation and were seeking their next steps as they started their walk with Christ. And just like every other night of the crusade, I received a great blessing just by being there and having the opportunity to serve.

After the service, I returned to my friends. All of them, including Jim, were smiling and happy. Jim ran up to me and blurted out to me, "I did it! I did it Walter! I accepted Christ as my personal savior!" I hugged him and thanked God for his decision. And we all returned home amidst the euphoria of the moment.

But, to my shame, here's the truth in the story. I wasn't as happy for Jim as I should have been. I was excited that Jim had accepted Christ. But I struggled with the fact it wasn't me who led him to make the decision. Trust me, I know how awful that sounds, but pride got in the way of what should have been a glorious time. I lost sleep over the fact that I had worked so hard to bring Jim to that moment of repentance. For over a year, I had patiently sought out answers for all of his questions. I had prayed fervently for him. I sat with him in long moments of conversation about what being a Christian meant to me in my life. I had nudged him in every way that I could think of to bring him into the fold. I had done this to the point of considering it a lost cause and calling it quits. And then, in one night, with one message, suddenly Jim answers the invitation and I'm not even the one who prayed with him and was able to rejoice with him in that football stadium. And yes, I felt resentment towards God and Billy Graham. I felt like Mr. Graham had stolen one of the jewels in my crown. After all, Billy Graham

had thousands of stars in his crown and mine had none to speak of. Jim's salvation experience should have been a star in my crown!

How ugly that sounds. And even worse, I was preaching and leading my own revivals at the time and here I was thinking that I should be getting a checkmark for Jim's salvation. Maybe it was because I worked so hard to bring Jim to that point, just to have it snatched away. I simply did not understand at the time. I may have been a preacher, but I was still a teenager struggling with understanding life at a very chaotic time in history. I was arrogant. I was foolish. I was jealous. I was angry. I was trying to fit the limitless love of God into my own compartmentalized understand of redemption and salvation.

But God, in his infinite wisdom, mercy and grace wrestled with me, and taught me about how off base I was. Taking my hand as he might a child's hand, he led me into a better understanding of his nature and the nature of repentance and salvation. And I found myself having to put on my own ashes of repentance and accept the mercy and grace he was showing me in my ignorance, pride, and anger. It was only then that I could clearly see how there wasn't any jewel to be stolen from anyone's crown; that crowns don't matter. Robes don't matter. Pulpits don't matter. Church buildings don't matter. Only souls matter. Ecclesiastes 7:6 reads like this:

We work to feed our appetites;

Meanwhile our souls go hungry.

Allow me to do a little paraphrasing there:

We work to feed our pride;

Meanwhile our souls go hungry.

Many verses in both Proverbs and Ecclesiastes talk about the trophies and rewards we seek on earth and how meaningless they are. They are meaningless because we don't understand the nature of God's plans and promises for us. For as long as we are seeking jewels for our crowns and adornments for our robes, we have missed the point entirely. So many of us believe that the harder we work the bigger our mansion in heaven will be, that the street of gold in front of our mansion is just a bit purer than our neighbor's.

John 4:34-38 tells us this:

34 "My food," said Jesus, "is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work.

35 Don't you have a saying, 'It's still four months until harvest'? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest.

36 Even now the one who reaps draws a wage and harvests a crop for eternal life, so that the sower and the reaper may be glad together.

37 Thus the saying 'One sows and another reaps' is true.

38 I sent you to reap what you have not worked for. Others have done the hard work, and you have reaped the benefits of their labor."

We all have our work to do. The purpose is to bring in the harvest, not to garner glory for doing so. But those doing the harvesting can't do their jobs if the

sowers don't do their jobs first. The sowers seeds will not come to fruition if there is no one to tend and water the crops. And while we may see the reaping as the most important job, the job with the greatest reward, nothing that the reaper does makes any difference if the sowers and the caretakers don't do their jobs. Everyone needs to fill the role that God has prepared for them.

When we discover our roles, God gives us peace as we fulfill those roles. He allows us to see our work come to fruition, but also opens our eyes to see that the fruit belongs to him, not us! The truth that I had to learn the hard way is that Billy Graham didn't save anyone. I didn't save anyone. Myron McIntosh didn't save Speedy Appleton. Neither did the sheriff. All fruit belongs to God because it is Jesus Christ who paid for it with his life.

I know that it is hard to accept, but the work of a Christian is not about reward. We may never see what we do come to mean anything during our lifetimes. The reward we gain comes with our own salvation through the love, grace, mercy, and sacrifice of Jesus, not by anything that we do. We can't do anything to earn that reward. Jesus bought and paid for it before we even came into being. The service that we offer is out of our love for that sacrifice and the mercy and grace that comes with it. Our purpose is to provide God's truth to people who are reluctant to hear and believe it. And that service comes in many forms, none of which is greater than the next. That is why it is so important to serve in the capacity that God chooses for us.

Jonah stepped into his role, albeit reluctantly. And because he fulfilled the role that God had for him, the city of Nineveh was spared destruction, much to

Jonah's chagrin. Jonah spoke. The people listened. Even the king paid attention.

10 When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he relented and did not bring on them the destruction he had threatened.

But we need to remember that Jonah didn't save anyone. Jonah did not save a single person. It was God that spared the city and only because the people repented, not because of anything that Jonah did. The words spoken by Jonah were given to him by God whose sole desire was to save the people of Nineveh.

The work that I did laying the groundwork for Jim's salvation was purposeful and deliberate. It was God's way of creating an environment for Jim that would be receptive to the message of God spoken through Billy Graham. There were no stars or jewels or robes handed out. There was a soul that was brought into the fold of God's Kingdom that was grown from a seed that was planted, nurtured, and reaped.

I want us all to think about these things this week as we review our roles serving the Creator of the universe. Are the words we speak the words he has given to us? Are the roles in which we serve the roles that God has called us to? Do we find ourselves seeking medals for doing those things that our precious Lord requires of us? When we look in the mirror, do we see a servant or royalty looking back at us? Do we take credit for things we know are brought about by God working through us? Do we embrace the role that God has given to us

knowing that what we are doing serves God's Kingdom to our best capacity?
And lastly, do we understand that nothing we do or say will save anyone; that salvation is solely through the sacrifice, mercy, and grace of Jesus Christ?

I pray that each of you finds the role that God has set aside for you so that others can see the love of Christ shining through work. For it is by performing the role that he has given us that will allow the fruit of our toil to ripen for harvest. I want us to see how the roles that God brings us to are necessary for the Salvation of Others.

10 When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he relented and did not bring on them the destruction he had threatened.

What we do in serving the Kingdom of God is important. It is only through our surrender to our roles that the fruit will ever be ready for harvest.

God bless you all!

AMEN

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