Sermon transcript

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Topic: Jonah Chapter 2: "Salvation is of the LORD!"

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From Mark chapter 12, I would like to read verse 24 and then verse 29.

[24] ***And Jesus answering said unto them, Do ye not therefore err, because ye know not the scriptures, neither the power of God?***

It is certainly true that none of us may speak in this way; only the Lord has the right to do so. And indeed, it is he who has spoken it. But people who search the Scriptures, whether Sadducees, Pharisees, or those on the Protestant or Catholic side; if one searches the Scriptures and reads them, and yet remains in error because one has not experienced the power of God, does not know it, then that is tragic. So the point is that the divine meaning of the Word is made known to us through revelation.

Brother Russ has already hinted at this. The Eunuch was sitting in his chariot, reading the prophet Isaiah. And Philip asked him, "***Do you understand what you are reading?***" [Act 8:30]

He was honest and said, "***How can I understand unless someone guides me?***" [Act 8:31]

From verse 29, Mark 12, from verse 29.

[29] ***And Jesus answered him, The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord:***

[30] ***And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength.***

That is quite a lot. We are to love the Lord with our whole being, with our mind, with our strength, with our soul, with our spirit, with everything. What I'm saying does not quite fit here either, but one can love without loving. We are to love God with all our heart, in his divine love, with which he first loved us, we are to love him in return. And then he comes first; then our life belongs entirely to him. We no longer think of ourselves; our time, our whole existence belongs to him. I shall read it again.

[29] ***The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord:***

[30] ***And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart…***

Reserve nothing for yourself, but surrender it entirely to the Lord.

[30] ***…with all your soul, with all your mind…***"

So do not think beyond God, but remain within the bounds of God's Word even in our thoughts, so that we may remain in God.

For Jesus said in John 15, "***If my words abide in you, and ye abide in me, then ye shall ask what ye will and it shall be done unto you.***" [Joh 15:7]

[30] ***…with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.***

A word concerning our connection and forgiveness, connection to God and our forgiveness, I would like to read from Romans chapter 5. Romans chapter 5. Here Paul has summarized it in a truly wonderful way. He writes as follows:

Romans chapter 5, verse 18 and 19:

[18] ***Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life.***

[19] ***For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous.***

God did not ask any of us whether we wished to be born into this world as sinners. It happened automatically. Every person born into this world since the time of Adam and Eve, without being asked, wherever on earth, has been born into this world separated from God. Hence the requirement: "***you must be born again, otherwise you cannot see the kingdom of God.***" [Joh 3:3]

God in his mercy created man fallible and consequently had to take responsibility for making amends for the fall, bridging the gulf and reconciling mankind to himself. And this was accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.

So just as through the transgression of the one we were all drawn into transgression, so through the obedience and righteous act of the one we have been restored before God as justified, as cleansed, reconciled to God and set as his own possession. [Rom 5:18-19]

Blessed is the person who can accept this in faith. In the Old Testament there is the account of Jonah, which best illustrates what salvation actually means and how it takes place. In Jonah it's found immediately after Amos and Obadiah. Very easy to locate in the Old Testament.

In Jonah it is stated here in chapter 2, Jonah chapter 2, from verse 1:

[1] ***Then Jonah prayed unto the Lord his God out of the fish's belly,***

[2] ***And said, I cried by reason of mine affliction unto the Lord, and he heard me; out of the belly of hell cried I, and thou heardest my voice.***

[3] ***For thou hadst cast me into the deep, in the midst of the seas; and the floods compassed me about: all thy billows and thy waves passed over me.***

[4] ***Then I said, I am cast out of thy sight; yet I will look again toward thy holy temple.***

[5] ***The waters compassed me about, even to the soul: the depth closed me round about, the weeds were wrapped about my head.***

[6] ***I went down to the bottoms of the mountains; the earth with her bars was about me for ever.***

It was no simple matter. You all know the story of course. Jonah told the people, the captain and the others on the ship, that he was a servant of the Almighty God. And yet he was fleeing from the mission God had given him. The Lord said to him, "***Go to Nineveh***" [Jon 1:2], and he set off for Tarshish.

And lo and behold a great storm arose and the boat was in danger of sinking. So they cast lots to find the culprit and lo and behold it fell on Jonah. And here in chapter 1, verse 9 he says:

[9] ***And he said unto them, I am an Hebrew; and I fear the Lord, the God of heaven, which hath made the sea and the dry land.***

Yes, that may well be true, but on the path of disobedience there is not much to be said for the worship of God. One can worship God, but please do so through faith and obedience. Otherwise, despite the worship, things will still go downhill. The path of disobedience leads despite worship down into ruin.

So the lesson we learn from this is: worship God, yes, but in faith, in the right way, on the right path, namely in obedience to God and God's Word. But one must say, he did have courage. He did not resist. He let them do to him what the situation demanded, namely that he had to be thrown overboard. And so it is written in chapter 1, verse 12. Perhaps we should read verse 11 as well so that we can understand it better.

[11] ***Then said they unto him, What shall we do unto thee, that the sea may be calm unto us? for the sea wrought, and was tempestuous.***

[12] ***And he said unto them, Take me up, and cast me forth into the sea; so shall the sea be calm unto you...***

So he had faith, it must be said. He merely lacked the courage to proclaim the Word of the Lord to that great city of 120,000 inhabitants, which was after all a vast

number in those days. For he did not think highly of himself. He faced this great task, he thought little of himself and thought: better to flee in a different direction.

And lo and behold he said to them:

[12] … ***Take me up and cast me forth into the sea, so shall the sea be calm unto you: for I know that for my sake this great tempest is upon you.***

So we see that people who become guilty go down. That was the case with Jonah. We have all become guilty before God. And the path we walk, the one we follow by nature, is indeed the broad way.

It may be lined with candles, it may be paved with good intentions, it may be brightly lit and adorned with all manner of splendor, yet the broad path leads to ruin. We have all been disobedient and so this applies to us all. Here we learn that it is the path we all take.

And then we read on from chapter 2, chapter 2, verse 7:

[6] ***I went down to the bottoms of the mountains; the earth with her bars was about me for ever: yet hast thou brought up my life from corruption, O Lord my God.***

He knew people had thrown him in, God had brought him out. God had even created the opportunity and sent a great fish there to act as a submarine. He was thrown into the sea, the submarine was there, took him in, it was that great fish after all, and straight away they went down to the bottom. And somehow he must have seen where he was. Whether the fish was transparent, God knows, he saw seaweed. And he does indeed recount the individual circumstances, whether he perceived them visually or not. One thing was clear to him: suddenly this submarine stopped, and lo and behold, the journey was over. Behind him everything was sealed off. The end, the final stop, finished, lost, gone forever.

And then he cried out to the Lord. A person must first hit rock bottom and grasp the hopelessness of the situation and realize that they have been cast into the deepest depth separated from God. And then comes the moment of crying out to the Lord for help.

And believe me, he could have called upon every priest in the world and none would have helped him. On the contrary, they would all have been lost with him. He could have called upon Mary and everyone else, but no one would have helped. Help comes from the Lord God. Whoever truly desires salvation and help should turn to the one who alone can provide salvation and help. Everything else leads only to disappointment, which in the end will be very great.

So, then I called upon the Lord. Perhaps I should read verse 8 as well.

[7] ***When my soul fainted within me I remembered the Lord...***

Yes, that was it. His soul despaired within him. It was all over. Then I remembered the Lord. Without distorting the Scripture, one might say, he remembered the Lord and the Lord remembered him. The Lord did indeed see him. He loved him, but he let him go his own way, which leads downwards, so that later he might walk on his path, the path of the Lord, which is crowned with mercy and lovingkindness.

[7] ***When my soul fainted within me I remembered the Lord: and my prayer came in unto thee, into thine holy temple.***

[8] ***They that observe lying vanities forsake the one in whom their salvation lies.***

We did not choose this text, nor did I add verse 9 later. This is how it is written here. Beloved, we do not judge, let alone condemn anyone. It simply pains us to see people going into eternity deceived by pious sayings. And I wrote it in a tract. From birth to death people are made saved, if possible with all seven sacraments. And in the end the truth comes out: the person in question is not saved.

I'll never forget it. It happened here in Krefeld when one of my former work colleagues passed away. And indeed, at the cemetery "it pleased the Lord to call him into glory." And in the church there in Bochum he was no longer in glory. He was down below and rituals had to be recited. Where is he now, down below or up above? At the cemetery they say he's in glory, in the church they say he's down.

I don't believe that people of the 20th century need to close their eyes, put on blinders and believe in traditions and customs. I mean the time when it was forbidden to read the Bible is over. But alas, now that it is permitted, nobody reads it either. And everyone goes along with the traditions and lo and behold the deception continues and people only realize it when it is too late.

In verse 10, Jonah then exclaims:

[9] ***But I will sacrifice unto thee with a voice of thanksgiving; I will pay that that I have vowed.***

Then comes the key sentence:

[9] ***Salvation is of the Lord.***

Your salvation and mine too comes from the Lord, who has become our savior by grace.

Beloved, let us give thanks to God together today that God did not abandon us but had mercy on us. And not only that, but also delivered us from our pious error and led us into his Word. Everything is truly grace. We would have gone the same way as the masses, had God not taken us in and had mercy on us. All the more does gratitude rise from our hearts to God. And we truly wish that the proclamation of the plain and simple yet effective and life-giving Gospel might be proclaimed to all humanity.

This reminds me of a letter we received, not last week, but the week before from Radio Luxembourg. You know, we held devotions there every Sunday morning for 10 years. And suddenly, out of the blue, a letter arrived. They remember us well and have suggested that we produce programs in German, English, and French. And I also ask that we all bring this before God in prayer. We do indeed want to reach our generation for the Lord.

Of course, anyone reading the prices might feel differently. You realize then how expensive times are. But the Lord did predict that expensive times would come, so we shouldn't complain about that. But that we bring this before the Lord. You know, we will soon be building office space and everything necessary to fulfill these tasks, so that the premises for this are provided. And then, in connection with this, I in particular have a request to pass on to you, which we wish to bring before the Lord together: that a team be put together, comprising the various languages, specifically German, English and French.

At the moment, everything is weighing on me, so to speak. I have the preaching to do, all the correspondence, I have the translations, I have to write and dictate everything in German and English, and so on, and then check it all. It's simply too much; it's not working.

Let us pray that God will find people and bring them together in such a way that everything can simply be synchronized and that all the needs can be met and addressed, so that we can reach this continent. The range of languages on offer goes even further: we can then, if we wish, offer services in Russian and Czech; the range covers a whole spectrum.

And I really do ask myself before God as well, whether it might be time to truly make one final effort with all our might, with every possibility, by every means. And this, in accordance with the Scripture: that "***this gospel of the kingdom may be preached to all peoples, tongues and nations***." [Mat 24:14, Rev 14:6]

It is not enough simply for us to say, "The Lord's return is near, and the signs of the times point to it." That is all true, but then we must get down to work. Of course, I too sometimes think that it would be nicer if I could rest a little. I have some friends; I could be somewhere in the mountains without having to pay, even in beautiful Switzerland—the same offer keeps coming up. But the question is whether I can, whether time allows it. Some say, Brother Branham also took time out; he went hunting, he went fishing. Those were his two favorite pastimes, alongside preaching. And there, of course, he was all on his own and with God. But for me, being banished to solitude would be a punishment. I simply have to be right in the thick of things, and the more that can be done for the Lord, and the better the time can be used, the better I feel.

May these brief words we have read and the remarks now made be a subject of prayer for us: that the Lord may truly arrange everything, guide it and coordinate it, so that his will may be done in all things. That we may not merely pray, "Thy

will be done," but that we may say, as our Lord said in the Gospel of John, "***My food is to do the will of him who sent me***." [Joh 4:34]

Let it be the concern of us all to do the Lord's will.

And just as Jonah cried out to the Lord, so may all who have felt that they are separated from God and that the path leads downwards, unless the Lord has mercy on us, may they call upon him. And it is written: "***Whoever seeks me, I will let myself be found by them***" [Jer 29:13-14], "***whoever knocks, the door will be opened to them***." [Mat 7:7, Luk 11:9]

I am certain that God will answer our prayers, and as we were told several times last night, let us do so with honesty and sincerity. For there is the Word: "***Whoever seeks me with all their heart, I will let myself be found by them***." [Jer 29:13-14]

God wants us to seek him, to find him, and for him to have mercy on us and to bless us beyond what we ask or imagine.

I shall just read once more this wonderful passage which was also particularly significant to Martin Luther concerning justification by faith: Romans chapter 5, verse 1. Romans 5, verse 1.

[1] ***Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.***

We have also understood justification very well. It is not simply some sort of "sorry" where the case is dismissed for lack of evidence. Justification means that the accused is not guilty at all; the guilt has been cleared, the guilt has been taken from him. He's being wrongly accused. We also heard Isaiah 53 yesterday. "***He took upon himself the guilt of us all***, ***he was wounded for our transgressions***, ***he was bruised for our iniquities***, ***the chastisement of our peace was upon him***, ***that we might have peace***, ***and by his stripes we are healed***." [Isa 53:5-6]

To be justified before God means that the fall which came upon humanity through sin has been undone and that man is placed before God as though he had never sinned, as though he had never been separated from God, reconciled with God, united with God, made partakers of God, made sons and daughters of God through the holy blood of the Lamb shed on the cross of Calvary.

For this salvation which has been given to us by grace, let us give thanks to God. And then we no longer need to go on a pilgrimage, not to our Kevelaer here, nor to Altötting or Częstochowa or anywhere else. No one needs to go on a pilgrimage to fall down somewhere and seek peace. Then we can begin our journey, as Bunyan wrote in his Pilgrim's Progress; then we can begin our pilgrimage with God and walk with him through this valley of tears until we pass from faith to sight.

The Lord will return; he will take his own to himself. And how wonderful it would be if none of us were missing on that day, if all were to accept the grace of God

in Jesus Christ our Lord and give thanks to God for it and seek no side paths or aids but receive the divine means, accepting reconciliation through the blood of the Lamb for themselves in faith. And then just cry out like Jonah, "***Salvation comes from the Lord***!" [Jon 2:9]

Not from a church, not from an institution, not from an evangelist, from nowhere; salvation comes from the Lord alone. Whoever is saved is saved by him, and whoever is blessed is blessed by him. Everything else are paths that lead past the goal.

May God grant us the grace to take these brief pointers from his word seriously. And I would like to say right now that here we are used to—it is probably not quite the right word—but we have experienced time and again that people come to the front, consciously surrender their lives to God and make their decision for Christ. At some point everyone must take the first step. If no start is made, there can be no progress and no completion. When we pray afterwards, should some of you feel moved to come to the front, to speak to God, to thank him for the Word and for his grace, please feel free to do so. No one here will criticize; here everyone wants to worship and everyone wants to seek the Lord together.

May it be as we read in Mark 12 that "***we all love God our Lord with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our mind and with all our strength***" [Mar 12:30], that our lives may be a praise of his glorious grace, that the love he has shown us might in some small measure be shown by us to him, so that we too may love him and one another in this divine love.

To him, the Almighty God, be all glory in Jesus' name. Amen.

Heavenly Father, I thank you from the bottom of my heart for your presence. I thank you for speaking to us through your Word. That you continue to work through your Holy Spirit. Lord, I know that many have been enlightened. You have done great things during the sermon. Beloved Lord, take us all into your care. Be merciful to us for the sake of your holy name. We give thanks that it has come to pass that we have found grace before you, that you have granted forgiveness, renewal, indeed peace with God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Beloved Savior, we ask this of you together. Take all our lives; take them as thanks for the fact that you went to your death for us, that from now on we may live for you. As Paul said: "***the life which I now live, I live by the faith of the Son of God***." [Gal 2:20]

Beloved Lord, may no one be missing and no one be lost who has heard your voice and received your Word. You are here to confirm the Word and to bestow a special blessing upon each one. Lord, Almighty God, lift up your countenance upon us and grant us your peace, not only here and in this place, but everywhere, in all places, in all churches. May you set watchmen on the walls of Zion to whom you may reveal your Word and your will. May what was proclaimed in the beginning be proclaimed once more. To you, the Almighty God, we give thanks together for everything, in Jesus' holy name. Amen.