**Salvation is also a continuing process**. Paul also wrote: *“The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to use who are being saved it is the power of God”* (1 Cor. 1:18). Here we have the present tense. We are a new person in Christ but we are not yet what we will ultimately be (1 John 3:2). Our salvation is begun, but it is not yet complete. We are fully forgiven, but not yet fully restored. We still struggle with the flesh and we fail in many ways; but God does not abandon us to defeat. We are being saved, and the continuing process of our salvation comes from the Lord.

As a prophet, Jonah knew and served God for many years, but his own heart still misled him. Even at the end of the story when Jonah became angry and frustrated, God was still saving him from the treason of his own heart. The process of straightening out what is twisted in us continues throughout our life and will only be complete when we reach heaven. Until then, we are in the process of waging war against sin as God forms the fruit of the Spirit within us. Salvation is a life-long process in which God is always working to make us more like Jesus. This continuing process is called sanctification, and it comes from the Lord.

**Salvation is also a future outcome**. Peter writes about *“the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time”* (1 Peter 1:5). God will bring about this future salvation when God takes us to be with God (1 Thess. 4:16-17). The glory that will be revealed in us then will make the trials of this life seem very small (Rom. 8:18). God will wipe all tears from our eyes, and Christ will lead us into all the joys of eternal life (Rev. 21:3-5).

Our salvation is begun in the completed transaction of justification. It continues in the ongoing process of sanctification. It will be completed in a future outcome that the Bible calls glorification. And all of this comes from the Lord, which is essential for us to understand, because left to our own devices we could not achieve our own salvation.

Jesus told a marvelous story about a good shepherd who had a flock of one hundred sheep (Luke 15:1-7). One of the sheep gets lost, and so the shepherd goes out to find it. When the sheep is found, the shepherd puts it on his shoulders and brings it back to the fold. A shepherd who opened the gate but then left the lost sheep to find its own way home would have an empty fold. The lost sheep do not know where the fold is. The open gate is of no use to them. They are lost and they cannot find it. The lost sheep need a good shepherd who will search for them, find them and carry them home. Jesus is that good shepherd. He does more than make salvation possible. Jesus saves!

Colin Smith writes that he had been a pastor for several years before he grasped that salvation comes from the Lord. “For many years I believed that God opens the door of salvation and then stands back, leaving it up to us to decide if we want to come in. Then, over time, I began to see that God has done more for me than make my salvation possible. [God] saved me.”

Knowing that salvation comes from the Lord helps us to navigate a God-centered life. If God made salvation possible and then stepped back, refusing to interfere with our free will, the entire Christian life would be about us: our believing, our serving, our following, our choosing to live a good Christian life. But seeing how God comes after us and lays hold of us and brings us to the fold opens up for us a new sense of worship and wonder, a new awareness of God‘s love, and a new confidence in what God can do in the lives of others.

God does more than make salvation possible. God saves! His love is seen not only in sending Jesus into the world, but in breaking into the lives of particular individuals to save them. Jonah knew this from his own experience. He saw that God actively engaged in all the events of his life, working for Jonah’s ultimate good, and this led Jonah to praise God. Notice how many times Jonah gives God the credit for acting in his life:

***You*** *cast me into the deep, into the heart of the seas, and the flood surrounded me;*

 *all* ***your*** *waves and* ***your*** *billows passed over me.*

*Then I said, “I am driven away from* ***your*** *sight;*

 *how shall I look again upon* ***your*** *holy temple?”*

*The waters closed in over me; the deep surrounded me;*

 *weeds were wrapped around my head at the roots of the mountains.*

*I went down to the land whose bars closed upon me forever;*

 *yet* ***you*** *brought up my life from the Pit,* ***O Lord my God****.*

*As my life was ebbing away, I remembered the* ***Lord****;*

 *and my prayer came to* ***you****, into* ***your*** *holy temple.*

*Those who worship vain idols forsake their true loyalty.*

*But I with the voice of thanksgiving will sacrifice to* ***you****; what I have vowed I will pay.*

*Salvation belongs to the* ***Lord****!’* (Jonah 2:3-9)

It can’t get more God-centered than that! Jonah is full of praise. He lifts up his heart to God and says, “Lord, you are the One who saves! It’s all You! I was done for, sinking down into the ocean, without help or hope, and You saved me!”

God set His love on us before we were born. All our days were written in God’s book before one of them came to be (Ps. 139:16). Before the creation of the world, we were on God’s horizon, and God planned all our days in love (Eph. 1:4). When Jesus came into the world, he came to save real people with names and faces, and if we are in Christ we are among them.

God did all of this for us before we were born, but it didn’t end there. God brought salvation to us, opening our eyes to see our sin, and drawing our heart to find hope in Jesus. Hope comes not from a “hands off” God who stands back and observes our decisions, but from a “hands on” God who is able and willing to step into our misdirected lives and turn us around so that we begin to love what we used to hate, and hate what we used to love. Every part of our soul is made new, but no part of our soul is wholly or completely new.

Think about salvation as an old house that is being renovated. Work goes on in every room, but there is no room in which the renovation is finished. Nothing in the house is as it was, and nothing in the house is as it will be. Life goes on in the house until even as the work moves toward completion. Salvation is a continuing process. We are not what we were, and we are not yet what we will be. That’s Jonah’s story is so valuable for us. Jonah knew and served God, and yet he struggled to live as God commanded; but through it all God stuck with Jonah, drawing him closer to God’s heart and more in line with God’s purpose, until Jonah could exclaim “Salvation comes from the Lord!”

No one of us is perfected – yet! The work God began in us before we were born continues, and as we navigate a God-centered life, that work will bear fruit, fruit that will last (John 15:16). Knowing that we are already justified in the eyes of God, that we are being sanctified as we become more like Christ and will one day be glorified in the Spirit should help us to exclaim with Jonah, “Salvation comes from the Lord!”

Prayer: Not one of us is worthy to approach you, O God, yet you have approached us and have shown us the human face of your love in Jesus, your Son, our Savior. He revealed your love and mercy by living as he did, serving others and accepting them as people made in your image and likeness. He pointed us towards a world in which each and every person could realize his or her identity as a precious child of yours. Jesus gifted us with the Holy Spirit so that the very fabric of our existence is woven with the thread of his life. May our lives be a true reflection of our thanksgiving, wonder and praise over such blessings. This we pray in Jesus’ name. Amen

Source: Colin Smith, *Jonah: Navigating a God-Centered Life*. Bell & Bain: Glasgow. 2012.

**Rejoice in God’s Salvation**

**Sunday, August 20, 2017**

**Federated Church, Fergus Falls, MN**

**Jonah 2:3-9**

Interventions happen when people have lost the ability to help themselves and when those who love them are unwilling to stand by and witness their self-destruction. This summer we’ve followed the story of God’s dramatic interventions in Jonah’s life. This is a story full of hope, reminding us of what God can do, not only for those who seek God, but also for those who, like Jonah, are determined to shut God out.

At times, Jonah ran in open rebellion against God. At other times Jonah served God, but he harbored hidden resentment. God’s intervention brought a double deliverance, and the ultimate triumph of God’s grace in Jonah’s life is reflected in his writing a book where God gets all the glory. Jonah takes no credit for the transformation in his life or for the powerful effect of his ministry. He confesses his own self-centeredness and leaves us marveling at the grace of God which would not let Jonah go.

As we come to the end of our study on Jonah, we circle back to the heart of his message: *“Salvation comes from the Lord”* (2:9). These words fly like a banner over Jonah’s story, communicating his life message in a single sound bite. “Salvation” is a word that can be used too glibly these days. The tow truck arrives and we say that we are “saved.” The computer geek retrieves our lost files so they can be “saved.” The TV evangelist invites people to come forward, raise their hand, or make a decision so that they can be “saved.” Salvation is more than being delivered from trouble or saying the right prayer or making the right decision. Salvation is a completed transaction, a continuing process and a future outcome, all of which come from the Lord.

**Salvation is a completed transaction**. *“It is by grace that you have been saved”* (Eph. 2:8), Paul wrote. Note the past tense. Christ died for our sins and rose for our redemption (Rom. 4:25). When we are made one with Christ through the bond of faith, God counts all of our sins as if they were Christ’s and all Christ’s righteousness as if it were ours. The completed transaction of our salvation means that we are justified (made right) before God. This gift of justification, which comes from God, means that our salvation is a done deal.