

## **“Rescued by Jesus”**

### **Matthew 12:38-41**

We are so glad that you are here with us to worship Jesus on this exciting day. Every time we come together to fellowship, pray, worship, and learn more about the Lord it is a wonderful occasion. Today, however, is a special occasion as we wrap up an amazing week of Vacation Bible School. All throughout this week we have learned that no matter what we face or go through, no matter how we feel or what our emotions tell us, no matter how difficult the situations or how heavy the weight – Jesus rescues. The theme of this week has been very interesting because of the timing of what we have been studying as a church. Over the past month we have been studying the book of Jonah in the Bible. We have seen from Jonah’s story how his life was a mess, but at every turn God was with him to show him His love and mercy. **Recap the story of Jonah.**

Maybe you are here this morning and you are wondering, “Pastor Matthew, what’s the big deal? What does the story of Jonah needing to be rescued have to do with Vacation Bible School? What does the story of Jonah have to do with the fact that Jesus rescues? What does this mean for me today?” Well, I’m glad that you asked. Jonah is one of the oldest stories in all the Bible, but every part of God’s Word is for His glory and our good. The story of how God worked through the life of Jonah is so important that Jesus Himself even spoke about it hundreds of years after it happened. Jesus told the story of Jonah for one primary purpose – He wanted the world to know that there is only one way that we can all be rescued from sin. The only way we can be rescued is through Him.

#### Show Text

The word “rescue” is one that all of us understand. It means to be “saved, spared, or freed.” Many of us have been to a rescue shelter where we have seen various animals that have been rescued. Or perhaps we have seen a baby animal left all alone and we have taken it and rescued it. I understand well what the word means because of an event that happened in my life many years ago. When I was about 5 years old, I was at a church member’s house. The couple had an older teenage son. Before I went to that house my mom told me, “Now Matthew, whatever you do, I don’t want you to play in their backyard.” My mom told me that because they had a big swimming pool in the backyard, and I didn’t know how to swim. Unfortunately, I didn’t listen very well to my mom’s instruction. As soon as I could, I went in the backyard and played anyway. I was fine, and everything was cool, until I got distracted. In fact, I saw a beautiful butterfly and I began to chase it. I was doing all that I could to chase it. But in my pursuit, I lost sight of where I was, and before I knew what was going on, I had fallen directly into the deep end of the pool. I was throwing my arms and kicking my legs, but nothing could help me. I tried to scream for help, but I only swallowed water. And, as I was struggling to get above the water, all of a sudden, the teenage boy who lived at that house came around the backyard to cut the grass. He saw me and knew that I was in trouble. He knew that I couldn’t swim, and I couldn’t save myself. So, without waiting, he immediately jumped into the pool and pulled me out of the deep water. That day, when I was just a little boy, he rescued me. When I couldn’t do anything to save myself, he swooped into the water and saved me. The truth is that Jesus did the same thing for us. When we couldn’t save ourselves and we couldn’t get out of our own sin and struggle, Jesus came down to this earth to save us and

rescue us. In **Luke 19:10** Jesus said it this way, “For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.” In other words, Jesus came to this earth to seek those who are lost and rescue them. Jesus came to rescue all mankind from our sin. The question that each of us must answer is this, “Have you been rescued by Jesus?” As we look closely at this passage of Scripture, I want us to make four observations about being rescued.

### **I.     The Predicament of Needing to Be Rescued (vs. 38-39a)**

I have already shared with you a story from my life where I felt that I needed to be rescued. Have you ever experienced anything like that? The truth is that there are many things that we might feel the need to be rescued from. I have had several moments of danger in my life where I felt I needed to be rescued. There have also been sometimes that I have been completely overwhelmed by stress and adversity and I have had to cry out, “Jesus, please help me.” There have been other times that I have felt pain and heartache and I felt despair and hopelessness and I have had to pray, “Jesus, please rescue me.” There have been times that I have worried or even feared what might happen and I have had to look to Jesus to rescue me. Being in a place where you need to be rescued is no fun. It isn’t a good place to be. It is a great predicament or dilemma. While none of us want to be in a physical, emotional, or mental dilemma, the truth is that without Jesus we are all in a spiritual dilemma or predicament.

The reason that we need to be rescued is because all mankind, every single one of us, have sinned against God. The Bible tells us in **Romans 3:10,23**, “As it is written, ‘There is none righteous, not even one’...For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” This means that we have all sinned against God and done things that grieve Him. Ever since the very first man, Adam, sinned against God, every single one of us was born with a sinful nature. Nobody had to teach us how to sin. We got that honestly when we inherited a sinful nature. **\*\*ILL:** We don’t have to teach a dog to bark, a cat to meow, or a fish to swim. That’s their nature. In the same way, we didn’t have to be taught to sin. This is our nature. And the Bible says that without Jesus we are stuck in our sin. **Romans 5:12** explains, “Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned.” **Romans 6:23a** says it plainly, “For the wages of sin is death.” This is a crisis of all crises. This is terrible. But, believe it or not, this isn’t the worst of the problem. I believe the worst of the problem is what we see in Matthew 12.

The fact that we are all sinners in need of a Savior is a huge problem. But the greatest problem is that some refuse to admit their need for a Savior. The Bible tells us here that the scribes and the Pharisees were listening to Jesus, they were watching Jesus, they were studying Him and examining everything about Him. However, they didn’t believe that Jesus was the Savior. They didn’t believe that He could rescue them, primarily because they didn’t see their need to be rescued. The scribes and the Pharisees were people who were very religious. The scribes were a group of people who worked really hard to study, translate, and transfer God’s Law. The Pharisees were the most moral and religious people of their day. The Pharisees studied the Law, tried their best to obey it, and thought so highly of it that they made sure that all of the other Jews were keeping it too. On the outside, they looked like pretty good people. They even thought of themselves as good people. Jesus was preaching to them that they must repent of sin and believe in Him, but they responded through words and actions by saying, “Jesus, we’re doing just fine. We are religious.

We study the Bible. We try to learn about God. We usually do good things. We are doing alright.” Because they tried to be good, they didn’t realize how sinful they really were. We see this in their statement, “Teacher, we want to see a sign from You.” In other words, they were just following Jesus in hopes that He would do something amazing. They were there just to see what He might do for them. They just wanted a cool experience. To them, following God was just like putting on a show or playing a game. Jesus revealed that they were stuck in their sin. He said, “An evil and adulterous generation craves for a sign.” They were basically saying, “Jesus, we don’t care what You’ve done, it isn’t enough. Do something better to prove that You are the Savior.” Think of that for just a moment. Jesus had already healed the blind man, the lame man, and the lepers. He had already raised several people from death to life and still that wasn’t enough. No matter what miracle He would have performed, it wouldn’t have satisfied them because they simply didn’t want to believe. They loved the life they were living. They didn’t want to admit their sin. They didn’t want to have to change. They refused to acknowledge their need to be rescued. Jesus tells us about this in **John 3:19-21** saying, “This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil. For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But he who practices the truth comes to the Light, so that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God.” One of the ways that we know the Pharisees and scribes did not believe in Jesus is that their actions were not done to honor and please God. They did the good things they did to be seen by man. They were simply trying to impress each other. But no amount of good works, good intentions, good thoughts, good feelings, or even good efforts can rescue us from sin. But these “good”, religious people simply didn’t want to acknowledge and admit that.

As sad as that is, the truth is that this still happens today. I can think of no greater tragedy than the fact that men and women and children still refuse to believe in the only One who can rescue them from sin. This is a grave predicament.

## **II. The Proof of The One Who Can Rescue (vs. 39b-40)**

Jesus, though, acted in grace and mercy. Even though another sign shouldn’t have been necessary, Jesus knew that God the Father had ordained that they receive one more sign. This sign would be the overwhelming proof that He alone is the Savior – that He alone can rescue them from their sin and from themselves. So, Jesus looks at this self-righteous, religious crowd full of hypocrites and says, “I will only give you one sign – the sign of Jonah the prophet.” Now, remember, Jesus had already given them many, many signs. They had all the evidence they needed to believe in Jesus and follow Him as Lord. They had all the evidence they needed to understand that He alone has all power and all authority. They had already heard Him teach and confound the wise, heard Him command and bring healing at just the sound of His voice, seen someone touch the hem of His garment and be immediately healed, and witnessed numerous occasions where He raised the dead to life. There had been numerous signs, but they stubbornly and defiantly didn’t want to accept them. Jesus said, “I will give you one further sign – the sign of Jonah.” What did He mean by that? He explains it in the very next verse. Just as Jonah was three days in the belly of the whale so, too, would Jesus be three days in the earth. Jesus is using Jonah as an illustration.

An illustration is a picture to help people understand the point that is being communicated. Think about Jonah for just a moment. All of the Jews of Jesus' day knew about Jonah. They knew that he was a prophet of God. They knew that he had an amazing story of getting on a boat, fleeing from God, and being thrown overboard because of his disobedience. Think about the event from their perspective. Jonah was thrown out of the ship and left alone in the middle of nowhere in the sea. There was no hope for him. Even the sailors knew that Jonah was going to drown, so they prayed that God wouldn't hold them guilty for kicking him off the boat. The sailors left Jonah out there, and in time, Jonah began to sink and to drown. To everyone who knew he was out at sea, in their mind, Jonah was dead. But, God intervened. Unbeknownst to the people, God prepared a great fish to swallow Jonah. Just like when a person has died and is buried deep into the ground, it was kind of like Jonah was buried deep into the ocean in the belly of the fish. But, after three days of being in the deep sea, out of nowhere the whale came up and spit Jonah out on dry land. Everyone thought Jonah was dead, but suddenly he was alive, and he had an important message to share. There was a specific reason that God has spared his life. Jesus told the Pharisees that God the Father had one more sign for them. Just like, to them, Jonah was dead, buried in the deep, and then suddenly came to life, in a similar way Jesus was going to die, be buried, and be raised again. Please understand Jesus literally died on the cross. Jesus' body was literally prepared with spices and buried in tomb. And three days later, Jesus rose again from the grave. In fact, Jesus had predicted that this would happen. **John 2:18-22** tells us, "The Jews then said to Him, 'What sign do You show us as Your authority for doing these things?' Jesus answered them, 'Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.' The Jews then said, 'It took forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?' But He was speaking of the temple of His body. So when He was raised from the dead, His disciples remembered that He said this; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had spoken." Here in Matthew 12, Jesus told the crowd, you will only be given one more sign. When I die, am buried, and rise again from the grave, you will have all the proof you need to know that I am the Savior of the world and the only One who can rescue you from your sin.

Even still today the world will tell us that there are many ways that somebody can be forgiven of their sin and be right with God. Even today there are those who will say, "Well we aren't that bad. God understands our situation, so just work hard to do a lot of good and you will be in heaven one day" Even today many will say, "Well, whatever seems right to you just go ahead and do that. You'll be fine." Even today many will say, "Mohammed was the prophet pointing us to Allah, and we all have the same God anyway." But all of that is a lie straight from hell. God does understand our sin and our need for a Savior, so He graciously made a way for us to be rescued. But, there is only one way and there is one clear sign – He would die, be buried, and would raise again. The only Person who ever lived a perfect, sinless life, died sacrificially, was buried, and rose again (just like He said He would) is Jesus. Jesus even said of Himself, in **John 14:6**, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me."

### **III. The Promise of The One Who Can Rescue (vs. 41b)**

By the time Jesus was telling this to the Pharisees, Jonah was now a history lesson. Jonah had lived hundreds of years earlier. As a result, Jonah was kind of celebrated. Because the Pharisees and the

Jewish leaders did things to be noticed by men and to seek praise, we can understand why they thought so highly of Jonah. From their perspective he was a bit of a hero. He had survived three days in the depths of the sea in the belly of a whale. That's got to be the coolest fish story ever. ☺ But, not only that. He went to a wicked, cruel, pagan people and spoke a five-word message. It was barely a complete sentence. And how did the people respond? They were moved. They were convicted. They were so overwhelmed that they believed in the God of heaven. They believed in the Israelites' God and they repented of their sin, prayed to God, fasted from food, and asked for Him to forgive and spare them. From the perspective of that day, Jonah was a hero, an amazing messenger of God who brought deliverance and salvation to at least 120,000 people. But, notice what Jesus said to the people. He said, "And behold." This word means "to pause and take in fully." "Behold, something greater than Jonah is here." Jesus was telling them to open their eyes and take note of what was going on. Yes, it was amazing that God had sent the prophet Jonah to Nineveh so that they could address their sins and believe in God and be spared. Yes, it was amazing the grace and mercy that God showed to Nineveh when they repented. But understand clearly, Jesus was saying, "Guys, something greater than Jonah is here now. The opportunity that you have today is greater. What God the Father is doing right now is greater. The Person standing before you now is greater than Jonah. Open your eyes and see. Don't miss the moment. Don't miss your opportunity. Something greater is here now." The Jews didn't want to accept this. They had idolized Jonah, so it was difficult for many to grasp. I believe there are many ways that Jesus is greater, but I'd like to give four quick ways that we know Jesus is greater.

#### **A. Jesus Willingly Came for All**

In the Jews idolizing Jonah, there were several things that they seemed to have forgotten. Apparently, they forgot that Jonah didn't even want to go to Nineveh. We remember with Jonah that he did eventually go to Nineveh, but that was after he had done everything he could to avoid it. Jonah didn't want to go to Nineveh, so he got in a boat heading the exact opposite direction. He wanted nothing to do with the people of Nineveh, even though that was God's plan for him. Jesus was greater than Jonah because Jesus didn't argue with God's plan. He didn't say, "But I don't want to." He didn't try to run in the opposite direction. Jesus willingly came to this earth. **Philippians 2:5-8a** says this about Jesus, "Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself..." Friend, Jesus willingly came to this earth for the glory of God the Father and the good of each of us. Jesus Himself said it this way in **John 10:10b**, "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly."

#### **B. Jesus Willingly Loves All**

Another way that we see that Jesus is greater than Jonah was that Jesus willingly loves all. The Jews spoke of Jonah as if he had willingly gone to Nineveh because he had such concern for the people. Again, they made Jonah out to be the hero. The truth is that Jonah despised the people of Nineveh. In fact, in Jonah 4:2 Jonah basically says, "God I know that you are a God of grace, mercy, and abounding in compassion. That's why I didn't want

to go to Nineveh. That's why I went the other direction. I didn't want the people of Nineveh to be spared. I wanted them to experience Your judgment." Jonah didn't love the people of Nineveh. He went only because he had to. He shared only what he had to. He did the bare minimum. Jonah didn't even know all of the sins of the people of Nineveh, but his heart was filled with anger and prejudice towards them. Thank God, this was not the case with Jesus. He knew the sins of all the world, yet He still willingly loved all. We see this all throughout the New Testament. Over and over again as we read through the life of Jesus we see moments where the Bible shows us that people were in a hopeless situation, but the next statement we read is, "And Jesus, moved with compassion..." When Jesus saw the people that were like sheep without a shepherd, He was moved with compassion. When Jesus saw the sick, lame, and diseased, He was moved with compassion. When giving the parable about the debtor who needed to be forgiven, Jesus specifically said that one to which the debt was owed was "moved with compassion, and loosed him, forgave him," (Matthew 18:27). When Jesus saw the despised and forsaken leper in Mark 1, again Jesus was moved with compassion. The point is that it doesn't matter your position in life, it doesn't matter how much money you have, it doesn't matter if you're healthy or not, religious or not, etc. Jesus willingly showed compassion and love for all. Jesus is greater.

#### C. Jesus Willingly Gave His Life for All

Again, Jonah made very little sacrifice for the people of Nineveh, and whatever sacrifice he made, frankly, he made unwillingly. He gave nothing. It required his time and a little discomfort, but that was all. Friend, Jesus is greater than Jonah because He willingly gave His very life. Remember that passage that we read from **Philippians 2:8** a moment ago? We ended with saying, "He humbled Himself..." The verse goes on to tell us how He humbled Himself. He did so "by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross." Friend, Jesus wasn't killed on a cross. He willingly gave His life on the cross. **1 Timothy 2:5-6** says it clearly, "For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who GAVE HIMSELF as a ransom for all, the testimony given at the proper time."

#### D. Jesus Willingly Saves All

**Galatians 1:3-4** explains why Jesus did all this. It says, "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for our sins so that He might rescue us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father." The Apostle Paul summarized it well in **1 Timothy 1:15a**, "It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." This is for you and me. This is for all the world.

### IV. The Prerequisite of Being Rescued (vs. 41a)

It is true that God loves all the world and that Jesus willingly came and gave His life so that we can be rescued from our sin and enjoy a relationship with God. However, this doesn't mean that we are automatically rescued. This was the point that Jesus was presenting to the scribes and Pharisees. They thought they were fine because they tried to do a lot of good. However, they were

still stuck in their sin. They still refused to admit their sin and believe in Jesus. It is then that Jesus explained to them, “The men of Nineveh will stand up with this generation at the judgment, and will condemn it because they repented at the preaching of Jonah.” In other words, when Jonah preached the truth to the people of Nineveh, they acknowledged their wrong and admitted they were wrong. They believed in God, turned from their sin, and begged God for grace and mercy. But, sadly, the religious leaders of Jesus’ day refused to do so. They, instead, hardened their hearts. They didn’t want to humble themselves. They didn’t want to admit their need for a Savior. They didn’t want to repent of their sins. Their rescue and salvation weren’t automatic. They had to believe in Jesus and repent of their sins. The same is still true with us today. Yes, God loves us, sent His Son for us, and has made a way for us to be rescued, but we must respond by believing in Him. **John 3:16** says it plainly, “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever BELIEVES in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.” **Romans 10:9,13** explains how you, personally, can be rescued from your sin, “If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved...for whoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved.” Friend, Jesus came to rescue us all. The question for each of us to answer is simple, “Have you been rescued by Jesus?” I pray that every single one of us, by the end of this service, can say emphatically, “Yes, by the grace of God, I have been rescued by Jesus!”