

IV. *Jonah's Prayer*

24-Dec-06 Jonah 1:17-2:10

Theme: Jonah's journey from death to life through the power and mercy of God foreshadows the death and resurrection of Christ – salvation is from the LORD.

Key Verse: Jonah 2:8-9 ⁸Those who regard worthless idols forsake their own Mercy. ⁹But I will sacrifice to You with the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay what I have vowed. Salvation is of the LORD.

Review

Last week we began our four-week study of the book of Jonah. The first chapter of Jonah is about the prophet's disobedience. Although he receives a clear command from God to preach judgment against the pagan city of Nineveh, Jonah runs the other direction and boards a ship bound for the edge of the world in a vain attempt to flee from the presence of the LORD.

God is not about to let his wayward prophet escape, and so He throws a mighty tempest upon the sea to get the attention of spiritually unconscious Jonah. The Gentile sailors, who seek relief from their various pagan gods, are nonetheless more spiritually alert than sleeping Jonah. Eventually, the sailors learn of Jonah's story as they hear his confession: "I am a Hebrew; and I fear the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land" (1:9).

Showing more concern for one man than Jonah did for all of Nineveh, the sailors vainly try to row to shore. However, they are unable to do so in the teeth of God's storm, and so they turn once again to prayer; but this time they pray to the LORD rather than to idols. Following the advice of Jonah, they throw the prophet overboard, and immediately the storm ceases. As Jonah "sinks" to the bottom of the sea, the sailors greatly fear the LORD and worship Him reverently.

On one level, Jonah chapter 1 is about the folly of trying to hide from God and the consequences of disobedience. But on a deeper level, Jonah chapter 1 is about our great and glorious God. Many of His attributes are clearly displayed: His justice, holiness, and righteous love; His sovereignty, omnipotence, and omnipresence; His providence, mercy, and grace. We serve a great and glorious God.

Introduction

Today, we leave the Gentile sailors behind and return our attention back to the prophet Jonah in 1:17-2:10. This is the passage that contains the familiar material – the part where Jonah is swallowed by the great fish. However, the text does not focus on that event, miraculous as it may be. Verses 1:17 and 2:10 frame the entire passage and deal with Jonah being swallowed and vomited by the fish. Note that the Hebrew word used here to describe the beast is quite general; it literally means "great fish" (not "whale"). The rest of the passage is Jonah's prayer while he is in the belly of the fish. Thus, the focus of the passage is on the prayer, not the fish. More specifically, the focus is on God, not the fish. And while we will take a few moments to discuss the miracle, our focus today will follow the text and be on the prayer and on God.

Before we study the contents of the prayer, I want to point out its structure. Like the rest of the book of Jonah, the prayer is highly organized. Nixon has suggested the following chiasmic structure for the prayer, with the central point being the nadir of Jonah's experience in his physical and spiritual descent:

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- A. Jonah cries out to the LORD because of his affliction (2:2a)
- B. Jonah cries out to God from Sheol and is heard (2:2b)
- C. Jonah is cast into the sea by God (2:3)
- D. Jonah is cast out of God's sight, from His holy temple (2:4)
- E. Jonah's soul is surrounded by water (2:5a)
- F. Jonah goes down to the deeps (2:5b)
- G. Jonah's lowest point (2:6a)
- F'. God raises Jonah from the pit (2:6b)
- E'. Jonah's soul faints; he remembers God (2:7a)
- D'. Jonah's prayer reaches God in His holy temple (2:7b)
- C'. (Jonah cast into the sea by) idol worshippers (2:8)
- B'. Jonah worships God with sacrifices and vows (2:9a)
- A'. Jonah rejoices that salvation is from the LORD (2:9b)

Exposition

A. Jonah & the Great Fish (1:17; 2:10)

Verses 1:17 and 2:10 form the bookends of this passage:

¹⁷Now the LORD had prepared a great fish to swallow Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.... ¹⁰So the LORD spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land (Jonah 1:17; 2:10).

There is no doubt that this passage describes a miracle. It is a miracle that the great fish swallowed Jonah; it is a miracle that Jonah was kept alive for three days inside the fish; and it is a miracle that Jonah was vomited safely onto dry land. It was also a miracle that the great fish was there in the first place to swallow Jonah. From first to last, the account of Jonah and the great fish is miraculous.

It is the highly miraculous nature of this account that causes many to doubt the historicity of the text. Those who don't believe in miracles won't accept this as an accurate retelling of what actually occurred. However, this should not be a stumbling block for those who believe in an omnipotent God, a God who created the heavens and the earth and sustains all Creation by the word of His power. If Jesus Christ can be resurrected from the dead, then Jonah can be "resurrected" from the belly of a fish. More on that connection later ...

Before we consider Jonah's prayer within the great fish, let us pause for a moment to consider three important points highlighted in these bookend verses. 1) In the first place, notice that the great fish was "prepared" or "appointed" by the LORD. The text leaves no doubt that God is responsible for Jonah's rescue. The fish swallowed Jonah under God's direction; the fish vomited Jonah at God's command. God is the sovereign Lord of Creation. This verb "appoint" is used repeatedly in Jonah chapter 4 to describe God power over the plant (4:6), the worm (4:7), and the east wind (4:8). In each case, it is God who actively intervenes in Creation to accomplish His purposes.

2) Secondly, notice the purpose of the great fish. God sent the fish not as a means of punishment, but as a means of *deliverance*. Jonah deserved to die for his sin, and he probably expected to die as he was cast overboard. However, God in His mercy and grace had other plans for the runaway prophet. The fish saved Jonah from death via drowning. If God wanted to save Jonah, why did He resort to this extreme measure? Surely He could have calmed the sea and

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transported Jonah to safety aboard the ship rather than inside the belly of a great fish. I think the answer to this question lies in the choices made by Jonah. Although God rescues Jonah from drowning, He does not rescue the prophet from the consequences of his own sin and folly. Jonah had fled from God; through his disobedience he had placed the entire ship in danger; and now he is reaping what he has sown. Thus, a secondary purpose of the great fish was as a means of *discipline*. Nixon makes this comment:

The Lord could have appointed a great bird to transport him to dry land; instead he appointed the great fish. The Lord does not usually protect us from the consequences of our own choices and actions. In His faithfulness and graciousness towards us, Yahweh comes with us into the consequences of our choices in order to save us there. Jonah had chosen the sea as his escape route; it is there that the Lord awaits him. Jonah was to discover for himself the impossibility of escaping God's presence. To learn this he needed to be in the place of human powerlessness, ultimately the place of death. Salvation is not, in the first instance, the Lord God taking us "out" of our mess, but God meeting us "within" it. Jonah will find salvation within his watery grave, for there, in the place which eloquently speaks of death, God will meet him.

3) Finally, notice the significance of the phrase "three days and three nights." In the Scriptures, journeys that last three days and three nights are often journeys from death to life. The classic example of this is the sacrifice of Isaac by Abraham. Abraham takes a three-day journey to the place of sacrifice (Gen. 22:3-4). Upon Mt. Moriah, Abraham prepares to slay his "only begotten son" in obedience to God's command. But at the final moment, God stays Abraham's hand, and Isaac, was "resurrected" from the dead. That is the meaning of this event according to the writer of Hebrews:

¹⁷By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, ¹⁸of whom it was said, "In Isaac your seed shall be called," ¹⁹concluding that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense (Hebrews 11:17-19).

There are many other examples of three-day journeys in the Scripture. Joseph predicts three day journeys of life for the Butler and death for the Baker while in prison (Gen. 40:1-23). Moses demands that Pharaoh let Israel go a three-day journey into the wilderness to worship God (Ex. 5:1-3). Having left the land of sin and death behind in Egypt, Israel prepares themselves for three days before receiving the words of life from God at Mt. Sinai (Ex. 19:1-25). Joshua and the children of Israel wait three days before crossing the Jordan River into the Promised Land (Jos. 1:11, 3:2). The two spies hid by Rahab in Jericho wait three days before returning to the Israelite camp (Jos. 2:16, 22). King Hezekiah is raised up from his death bed after three days and given 15 more years of life (2 Ki. 20:5-6). Esther prepares herself for three days before going before the king, not knowing whether death or life awaits her (Es. 4:12-5:8). Following Solomon's death, the kingdom of Israel splits in two after a three-day wait (1 Ki. 12:5, 12). That's actually a negative example, where they go from life to death instead of the other way around. Likewise, another negative example is the three-day plague following David's census sin (2 Sam. 24:13; 1 Chr. 21:12).

Jonah's sojourn of three days and nights in the belly of the fish is another example of a three-day journey in the Bible, a journey from death to life. In his prayer, he cries out from "the belly of Sheol" (2:2b); that is, the grave or the place of the dead. Jonah is as good as dead and he knows

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it. Thus, when the fish vomits Jonah out onto dry land after “three days and three nights,” what we have is a symbolic resurrection – Jonah, who is as good as dead, returns to the land of the living. Of course, all of these three-day journeys from death to life point to the great and final return from the dead – the resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We will study the connection between Jesus and Jonah at the end of our lesson today.

B. Jonah’s Prayer of Praise (2:1-9)

1. *Prayer of Praise (2:1)*

Jonah’s prayer is introduced at the start of chapter 2: “Then Jonah prayed to the LORD his God from the fish’s belly” (2:1). Notice that Jonah prays to “his God.” This is significant; for the first time in the story, we see Jonah responding like the LORD is his God. He is no longer running away from God; he is running toward Him in prayer.

The prayer that follows is a source of some controversy in the critical commentaries. The form of the prayer is in a psalm of praise. Some commentators find the theme of the prayer – thanksgiving – to be at odds with Jonah’s current situation in the belly of the fish. Others believe the psalm to be out of character; to this point Jonah has not been portrayed as thankful, and later on Jonah will also display a churlish attitude (4:1-3, 8-9). However, these objections are not insurmountable. A prayer of thanksgiving is entirely appropriate at this point in the story, because Jonah has been saved; he has been delivered from drowning. It is clear that God has more plans for Jonah and Jonah is responding in an appropriate manner to the grace and mercy of God. The psalm also bridges the gap between chapters 1 and 3. Jonah’s gratitude in chapter 2 explains why he is willing to obey God’s second call in chapter 3.

Other commentators believe that the psalm was inserted later because of linguistic or literary differences with the rest of the book. Allen takes the position that the narrator “selected the psalm from an existing collection and inserted it to give voice to Jonah’s sentiments.... The psalm is obviously not made to measure, but as a secondhand article it is a remarkably good fit.” However, there is no reason to be so cavalier with the Scripture, dismissing it as a “secondhand article.” The prayer before us is presented as the words of Jonah, and we will approach it in that manner.

The prayer itself can be divided into three stanzas. I’ve chosen to label them according to the direction Jonah is headed: 1) “going down” in vv. 2-4; 2) “bottomed out” in vv. 5-6; and 3) “coming up” in vv. 7-9. I’ve also chosen to reproduce the text of the prayer according to the chiasmic outline proposed above by Nixon.

2. *Going Down (2:2-4)*

A. I cried out to the LORD because of my affliction, and He answered me. (2:2a)

B. Out of the belly of Sheol I cried, and You heard my voice. (2:2b)

C. For You cast me into the deep, into the heart of the seas, and the floods surrounded me; all Your billows and Your waves passed over me. (2:3)

D. Then I said, ‘I have been cast out of Your sight; yet I will look again toward Your holy temple.’ (2:4)

Jonah begins his petition to God by acknowledging his condition. Without doubt, being lodged inside the stomach of a large fish could be considered an “affliction.” Jonah piles up water imagery to describe his situation: the deep, the heart of the seas, the floods, the billows, and the waves. These terms reinforce the gravity of his predicament; he is going down into the depths of

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the sea. Jonah further describes his position in the fish as the “belly of Sheol.” Jonah realizes that he is as good as dead. In Hebrew thinking, “Sheol” referred to the grave, the place of the dead, or the pit of death. For example:

¹⁶For You will not leave my soul in Sheol, nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption (Psalm 16:10).

¹⁸For Sheol cannot thank You, Death cannot praise You; those who go down to the pit cannot hope for Your truth (Isaiah 38:18).

However, Jonah understands why he is in his present predicament: “for You cast me into the deep.” There is no contradiction here between the fact that the sailors threw Jonah overboard and Jonah’s statement assigning responsibility to God. They are one and the same: God uses the sailors to accomplish His will. Jonah recognizes that his plight, although of his own making, ultimately is under the sovereign control and authority of God.

Knowing that God is in control of his situation leads Jonah to cry out to the LORD. Notice Jonah’s confidence in God’s ability to hear and answer prayer: “He answered me ... You heard my voice.” Jonah is still in the belly of the fish, and yet he is confident that God hears and answers prayer. He has been cast out of the presence of God and finds himself in Sheol; but even in Sheol, he has not been abandoned by God. Jonah has learned the hard way there is no place where he can run and hide from God. God is present with Jonah, even in the belly of a great fish in the bottom of the sea.

Jonah’s understanding of God’s sovereign control leads him to hope. Although he had been cast out from the presence of God (his stated desire in 1:3), he now longs to be in God’s presence once again. Thus, Jonah says, “I will look again toward Your holy temple.” Jonah turns his attention to the place of worship, the place of God’s presence, the place of service. Jonah realizes how foolish he had been to flee from God. He is now ready to return to God and to serve and worship Him.

As Jonah began his prayer, perhaps he had been meditating upon Psalm 18, which contains similar language and motifs to the first stanza of Jonah’s psalm of thanksgiving:

⁴The pangs of death surrounded me, and the floods of ungodliness made me afraid. ⁵The sorrows of Sheol surrounded me; the snares of death confronted me. ⁶In my distress I called upon the LORD, and cried out to my God; He heard my voice from His temple, and my cry came before Him, even to His ears (Psalm 18:4-6).

3. Bottomed Out (2:5-6)

E. The waters surrounded me, even to my soul; (2:5a)

F. The deep closed around me; weeds were wrapped around my head. (2:5b)

G. I went down to the moorings of the mountains; the earth with its bars closed behind me forever; (2:6a)

F’. Yet You have brought up my life from the pit, O LORD, my God. (2:6b)

Jonah continues to sink in verse 5, as the waters surround him and the deep closes in about him. Although Jonah has already had a change of heart in verse 4, his situation has not improved; in

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fact, it has gotten worse. Like a stone wrapped in seaweed, Jonah is sinking straight to the bottom of the sea.

In the first half of verse 6, Jonah reaches the bottom of his descent. He sinks or descends down to the roots of the mountains. In essence, Jonah has described a journey to the realm of death – the underworld. According to Mackay, most commentators understand the phrase “the earth with its bars” equivalent to saying the “gates of the underworld” or the “gates of death” (*cp.* Is. 38:10). This is the end of Jonah’s downward journey: first he went down to Joppa (1:3a); then he went down into the bottom of the ship (1:5); and now he has arrived at the bottom of the sea. Jonah has bottomed out.

Which means, of course, that there is nowhere to go but up. Jonah’s upward journey starts when God intervenes: “yet You have brought up my life from the pit, O LORD, my God.” Jonah’s sinfulness and rebellion have brought him low; it is the power and grace of God which lifts him up out of the pit, up from the “gates of death.” In this regard, Jonah shares a similar experience with David, who writes in Psalm 9:

¹³Have mercy on me, O LORD! Consider my trouble from those who hate me, You who lift me up from the gates of death (Psalm 9:13).

4. Coming Up (2:7-9)

E’. When my soul fainted within me, I remembered the LORD; (2:7a)

D’. And my prayer went up to You, into Your holy temple. (2:7b)

C’. Those who regard worthless idols forsake their own Mercy. (2:8)

B’. But I will sacrifice to You with the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay what I have vowed. (2:9a)

A’. Salvation is of the LORD. (2:9b)

Notice the change in the tone and imagery of this third stanza of Jonah’s psalm of thanksgiving. The first stanza emphasized the downward descent of Jonah through the waters of death. The second stanza continued that descent into the deep until Jonah bottoms out. It is when Jonah is at his nadir that God intervenes to bring Jonah up out of the abyss. And now, here in the third stanza, we have more upward language, as Jonah’s prayer ascends to God’s temple, balancing out the chiastic reference to God’s temple in verse 4. Jonah has remembered God; and God has remembered Jonah and answered his prayer.

Verse 8 is a difficult one to translate and to understand. In the original Hebrew, the verse is only five words long. The first three words are related to the practice of idolatry, although the Hebrew word translated “idol” is literally “snare.” This same Hebrew phrase is also found in Psalm 31, where it translated in the same way, referring to idolatry:

⁶I have hated *those who regard useless idols*; but I trust in the LORD (Psalm 31:6).

The last two Hebrew words of verse 8 can either mean: 1) “they have abandoned their loyalty to you;” or 2) “they forfeit the grace that was theirs” (Alexander). The word translated as “loyalty” or “grace” is *hasdam* and is related to the word *hesed*, which refers to God’s mercy or loving-kindness.

What is Jonah saying here in verse 8? The ambiguity of the text can lead to multiple meanings, all of which may be intended. First, Jonah may be thinking of the Gentile sailors on board the ship and the futility of their prayers to their pagan gods. Jonah has described in this psalm how

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his prayers have been heard and answered by the LORD in His holy temple. By contrast, those who worship idols will eventually discover the futility of doing so and abandon them, just as the sailors seemed to do. In the second place, Jonah may say that “those who forsake their allegiance to God risk losing *hesed*” or God’s loving-kindness (Estelle). This was always the problem with Old Testament Israel. They were constantly tempted to worship other gods, forsaking the grace and mercy of the LORD for worthless idols. Finally, Jonah may be personalizing this statement, reflecting on how his own personal idolatry—the idolatry of putting his desires ahead of God’s commands—has resulted in futility and the removal of God’s mercy from him.

Jonah has put his idolatry behind him; he has recognized the futility of running away from God and now is ready to worship God and serve Him actively. In verse 9, Jonah expresses his positive desire to offer sacrifices and fulfill his vows. These are acts of worship and service that will restore him to the presence of the LORD. Jonah is no longer fleeing from God, he is no longer AWOL; instead, he is seeking to return to “active duty.”

Notice the comparison with the Gentile sailors at the end of chapter 1. The sailors “feared the LORD exceedingly, and offered a sacrifice to the LORD and took vows” (1:16). Likewise, Jonah at the end of chapter 2 once again fears or worships God; he is prepared to sacrifice and pay his vows. Allen comments:

The narrator intends his audience to draw a parallel between Jonah’s experience and that of the seamen. Both faced a similar crisis, peril from the sea; both cried to Yahweh, acknowledging His sovereignty. Both were physically saved; both offered worship. Ironically Jonah is at last brought to the point the Gentile seamen have already reached.

Jonah ends his psalm of praise and thanksgiving with a declaration of God’s saving work: “Salvation is of the LORD.” Boice describes Jonah’s thankfulness regarding God’s salvation:

Jonah was not thankful that God had delivered him from the fish because God had not yet delivered him. He was not thankful that God was going to deliver him, because he had no idea that God was going to do it. What he was thankful for was that God had turned him from rebellion and had caused him to call on the name of the Lord once again. He was thankful for salvation. He was thankful for the abiding grace of God.

What a change has come over our prophet! Jonah has undergone a tremendous “attitude adjustment” inside the belly of the fish. Although it was not a pleasant physical experience, it was nonetheless a profitable spiritual experience. Jonah had been restored to the presence of God, even though he was still inside the fish.

Sometimes we go through experiences in life that feel like God has put us in the belly of a great fish. Whatever the trial is – financial, relationships, health, death of loved ones, other emotional loss – it is never pleasant or enjoyable. The physical and emotional pain can be tremendous. And yet, there is always the opportunity for spiritual benefit. When you feel like Jonah, when you are at the end of your rope or at the bottom of the ocean, call upon the Lord. If you turn to Him and trust in Him, He will bring you up out of the pit of your despair. He won’t necessarily remove the trial, but He will give you the grace to endure it. “Salvation is of the LORD.”

C. The Sign of Jonah (Mt. 12:38-42; 16:1-4; Lk. 11:29-32)

What is the connection between Jonah and the great fish and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ? Jesus teaches on this subject in three places in the gospels. In Matthew 16, when the Pharisees

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and Sadducees seek a sign, Jesus rebukes them and tells them they will receive no sign but the sign of the prophet Jonah (Mt. 16:1-4). In parallel passages in Matthew 12:38-42 and Luke 11:29-32, Jesus expands upon the sign of Jonah. We will study the text in Matthew 12:

³⁸Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered, saying, "Teacher, we want to see a sign from You." ³⁹But He answered and said to them, "An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. ⁴⁰For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. ⁴¹The men of Nineveh will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and indeed a greater than Jonah is here. ⁴²The queen of the South will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and indeed a greater than Solomon is here (Matthew 12:38-42).

Jesus refuses to give those seeking a sign any sign except the "sign of the prophet Jonah." Exactly what is that sign, and what is Jesus teaching in this passage?

Essentially, Jesus is teaching us to read our Bibles typologically. He is making a connection between the life of Jonah and His own life. What happens to Jonah is a type or shadow of the reality of Jesus Christ. In Matthew 12:40, Jesus gives us the key to understanding the type of the "three-day journey" that we have already discussed. Jonah's three-day journey from death to life, from the belly of Sheol to restoration, is a picture or type that points to the greatest three-day journey from death to life: the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

A type is always an imperfect picture of the reality to come. The shadow points to the substance; the inferior points to the superior. Yet Jonah, warts and all, still points to the ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ, the greater Jonah. The gospels point out clearly that Jesus is greater than Jonah. For example, the parallel passage in the gospels to Jonah chapter 1 is in Mark 4:

³⁵On the same day, when evening had come, He said to them, "Let us cross over to the other side." ³⁶Now when they had left the multitude, they took Him along in the boat as He was. And other little boats were also with Him. ³⁷And a great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that it was already filling. ³⁸But He was in the stern, asleep on a pillow. And they awoke Him and said to Him, "Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?" ³⁹Then He arose and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Peace, be still!" And the wind ceased and there was a great calm. ⁴⁰But He said to them, "Why are you so fearful? How is it that you have no faith?" ⁴¹And they feared exceedingly, and said to one another, "Who can this be, that even the wind and the sea obey Him!" (Mark 4:35-41).

In Mark chapter 4, Jesus sleeps in a boat, just as Jonah slept. A great storm arises and fills the disciples with so much fear that they panic and wake up Jesus. Sound familiar? So far, the stories are similar. But this is where they diverge. While Jonah has no power over the storm himself, Jesus does. Jesus calms the wind and the waves by the word of His power, demonstrating that He has the same authority over Creation as the LORD who stills the tempest when Jonah is cast overboard. What is the result of the storm's calming? The disciples "feared exceedingly," just as the Gentile sailors feared. Mark is making a connection between Jonah and Jesus, demonstrating that Jesus is a greater Jonah because Jesus is Yahweh, the LORD God.

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The scribes and the Pharisees had already been given many signs by Jesus. He had healed the sick, cast out demons, turned water into wine, and walked upon the sea. Yet, these signs of His divine nature and power were not enough and would never be enough to satisfy their sinful and wicked hearts. In fact, just a few verses earlier, the Pharisees had ascribed Jesus' power of casting out demons to the devil rather than to God (Mt. 12:24). That is why Jesus calls them a wicked and adulterous generation. They twisted and perverted the truth so much that they did not recognize God in the flesh when He stood in front of them.

Jesus refuses to give them any more "signs" other than the greatest one of all: the sign of His resurrection. Not only is this a sign that brings life to those who believe in Christ, it is also a sign that condemns those who don't put their trust in Him. The scribes and Pharisees will play a big part in betraying Christ and sentencing Him to death. However, they will not share in the life-giving power of Christ's resurrection. Instead, the sign of Jonah, the sign of Christ's resurrection, will also be the sign of their judgment and condemnation.

Jesus emphasizes that the sign of Jonah is a sign of condemnation for the generation of Israel who refuses to believe in Him. The pagan Gentiles of Nineveh, renowned for their wickedness, repented at the preaching of Jonah. And yet, most of Israel refused to repent when Jesus, the greater Jonah, appeared. What a contrast!

Conclusion

The unbelieving world is always looking for a sign. "If only God would show me a sign, then I would believe." The truth is that God has already given us the greatest of signs: the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. There is no other sign necessary. All that we need to know and believe has already been revealed in God's word. In a typological way, the "resurrection" of Jonah from the belly of the great fish points to the greater reality of the risen Savior.

In his prayer, Jonah declares that "salvation is of the LORD." Jesus, whose very name means "the LORD saves," is that salvation. The sign of Jonah confronts us with a choice: will we trust in Jesus for our salvation, or will we seek our own way? Will we run from the LORD like disobedient Jonah, or will we seek the LORD and worship Him like repentant Jonah?

In one sense, we are all like Jonah in the belly of the great fish. By our sin natures, we have been condemned to death. We are destined for Sheol, the grave, the pit. But in the great mercy and sovereign grace of God, He hears the prayers of His people and rescues them from the very gates of death. The apostle Paul puts it this way:

³Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? ⁴We were therefore buried with Him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life (Romans 6:3-4).

Christian, you have been raised up out of the waters of death into new life through your union in Christ. We are no longer under condemnation for our sin, but we can rejoice and praise God for the sign of Jonah and the resurrection of our Savior which guarantees our salvation. Surely we can join in with the prophet Jonah and rejoice: "Salvation is of the LORD!"

Next week: Lesson 5 – Jonah's Obedience – Jonah 3:1-10

Close in Prayer.