

Jonah 2

- Our final verse from last week was one of the climatic moments of this brief book

[Jonah 1:17](#) And the LORD appointed a great fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was in the stomach of the fish three days and three nights.

- Last week we explored how God might have accomplished this act
 - And it came down to a supernatural preservation of Jonah
 - But in the midst of trying circumstances
 - Basically, it was better than death, but only barely
 - And as such, it became a convenient way to hold Jonah safe while at the same time placing him in a situation where he could contemplate his circumstances
 - And this week, I'll add one additional consideration
 - God's choice for how to save Jonah included a bonus advantage
 - Fish can swim
 - And a swimming fish can cover significant ground
 - Some species of whale are known to traverse half-way around the globe when migrating
 - So about the time Jonah is ready to leave his fish prison, he will find himself returned back to the shores of Israel
 - A one way ticket to obedience
 - What an awesome display of God's power over His creation to accomplish His will
 - And a sober reminder that when God is determined to accomplish His will through us
 - He can do it the easy way or the hard way

- Verse 17 may have reminded you of a verse we studied from Luke's gospel, which is also in Matthew's gospel
 - There comes a moment in both gospels where Jesus is rebuking the Pharisees
 - And Jesus draws a comparison between Himself and Jonah
 - Specifically, here's what Jesus says:

[Matt. 12:38](#) Then some of the scribes and Pharisees said to Him, "Teacher, we want to see a sign from You."

[Matt. 12:39](#) But He answered and said to them, "An evil and adulterous generation craves for a sign; and yet no sign will be given to it but the sign of Jonah the prophet;

[Matt. 12:40](#) for just as JONAH WAS THREE DAYS AND THREE NIGHTS IN THE BELLY OF THE SEA MONSTER, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.

[Matt. 12:41](#) "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; and behold, something greater than Jonah is here.

- So what is the comparison Jesus is making here in Matthew?
 - First, let's understand the circumstances in which Jesus made this statement
 - He is under assault from the Pharisees
 - They considered Jesus to be a fraud and a threat to their authority among the people
 - Jesus had just healed a demon-possessed man who was mute
 - This gets the crowd asking if Jesus could in fact be the real Messiah
 - So at this point, the Pharisees ask Jesus for a sign
 - Asking for a sign meant seeking tangible evidence that the word of the prophet could be trusted
 - It was a test born out of disbelief
 - They needed a sign in order to believe
 - Different from a sign to bolster faith ie. Gideon

- Jesus responds that eagerly seeking (or craving) for a sign was characteristic of an evil and unbelieving generation
 - And to that kind of unbelief, the only sign given would be the sign of Jonah
 - Jesus goes on to quote Jonah 1:17 and then makes a comparison to His own coming death and resurrection
 - So immediately I'm struck by the fact that Jonah's experience in the fish was orchestrated by God so that it could be useful as a picture of Christ
- So again, how is Jonah's experience similar to the sign Jesus would give through His death and resurrection?
 - Let's start with the obvious part of the comparison – the part that Jesus Himself gives us
 - When Jonah comes out of the fish, his return is as if from the grave
 - Having been buried in the sea for three days and nights
 - And the picture of death is magnified even further when we remember that the Jews saw the deep of the ocean as a picture of the abyss
 - The word for abyss is often used to describe the deep sea in the New Testament
 - So for any Jew, Jonah's return from the fish would be an obvious picture of death and resurrection
 - And Jesus' comparison makes that connection all the more obvious for us
- Jonah's experience in the fish was to be a picture of Jesus' time in the grave
 - Of how Jesus went down into the depths of death and returned again
 - But in what way is this a sign to this evil generation facing Jesus in Matt. 12?
- Well consider Jonah's experience a little more in detail, even knowing just what we've learned in Chapter 1

- Like Jesus in His day, Jonah lived during an evil and unbelieving generation within the northern kingdom of Israel
- In fact, in Jonah's day, there was another prophet who declared God's word to the rebellious nation of Israel
 - Hosea declared God's coming judgment on Israel

Hos. 5:1 Hear this, O priests!

Give heed, O house of Israel!
Listen, O house of the king!
For the judgment applies to you,
For you have been a snare at Mizpah
And a net spread out on Tabor.

Hos. 5:2 The revolvers have gone deep in depravity,
But I will chastise all of them.

Hos. 5:3 I know Ephraim, and Israel is not hidden from Me;
For now, O Ephraim, you have played the harlot,
Israel has defiled itself.

Hos. 5:4 Their deeds will not allow them
To return to their God.
For a spirit of harlotry is within them,

- So we have this interesting situation in Jonah's day
 - Where on the one hand we have Hosea sent to the nation of Israel with a message of judgment
 - And on the other hand, we have Jonah sent through Israel
 - He will be deposited on the Israeli shores and will then proceed to walk through the nation toward Nineveh
 - So in literal terms, Jonah passes by Israel in order to declare mercy to a foreign people – people who were enemies of Israel
 - And though Jonah was a prophet to that kingdom, there is no record of Jonah's ministry produced converts in His own nation
 - Certainly not on the scale as those in Nineveh
 - Though there is no evidence that God ever used Jonah on a large scale to bring the nation of Israel back to Himself

- Yet here we are watching God go to tremendous effort to bring a Gentile nation to repentance
 - My point here is that God could have done all the same things for His people had He desired to do so
 - But instead, God sent Jonah to a foreign people in order that they might be saved
- So now we have another piece of the puzzle for how Jonah is a sign to the evil generation in Jesus' day
 - Jonah was a man brought back from the grave having been buried for three days at sea
 - And when he returns, he passes over Israel to bring a message of repentance to a foreign people
 - Likewise Jesus, after spending three days in the grave, will bring a message of repentance that passes over the nation of Israel and is received by a foreign people

Rom. 10:19 But I say, surely Israel did not know, did they? First Moses says,
 "I WILL MAKE YOU JEALOUS BY THAT WHICH IS NOT A NATION,
 BY A NATION WITHOUT UNDERSTANDING WILL I ANGER YOU."

Rom. 10:20 And Isaiah is very bold and says,
 "I WAS FOUND BY THOSE WHO DID NOT SEEK ME,
 I BECAME MANIFEST TO THOSE WHO DID NOT ASK FOR ME."

Rom. 10:21 But as for Israel He says, "ALL THE DAY LONG I HAVE STRETCHED OUT MY HANDS
 TO A DISOBEDIENT AND OBSTINATE PEOPLE."

Rom. 11:7 What then? What Israel is seeking, it has not obtained, but those who were
 chosen obtained it, and the rest were hardened;

Rom. 11:8 just as it is written,
 "GOD GAVE THEM A SPIRIT OF STUPOR,
 EYES TO SEE NOT AND EARS TO HEAR NOT,
 DOWN TO THIS VERY DAY."

Rom. 11:9 And David says,
 "LET THEIR TABLE BECOME A SNARE AND A TRAP,
 AND A STUMBLING BLOCK AND A RETRIBUTION TO THEM."

Rom. 11:10 "LET THEIR EYES BE DARKENED TO SEE NOT,
 AND BEND THEIR BACKS FOREVER."

Rom. 11:11 I say then, they did not stumble so as to fall, did they? May it never be! But by
 their transgression salvation has come to the Gentiles, to make them jealous.

- In Jonah's day, the jealousy would be provoked by God's relationship with the Assyrian nation
 - In the days following Jesus' coming, the jealousy is provoked because of the Church
 - We are the Gentiles that have received what Israel has rejected
 - We are the ones being received like those Ninevites while the nation of Israel stands temporarily outside, looking in
- But there is still one more piece to this puzzle
 - The sign of Jonah is not just a sign that Jesus is God's prophet sent to save Gentiles
 - Look at the last verse in that passage we read out of Matthew

[Matt. 12:41](#) "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; and behold, something greater than Jonah is here.

- From Jesus' statement, it's clear that the sign of Jonah is ultimately a sign of judgment
 - God is prepared to save Gentiles
 - But He is also going to bring judgment to Israel
- Consider the parallels between Jonah and Jesus again
 - In Jonah's day, the judgment against Israel was declared by Hosea

[Hos. 11:1](#) When Israel was a youth I loved him,
And out of Egypt I called My son.

[Hos. 11:2](#) The more they called them,
The more they went from them;
They kept sacrificing to the Baals
And burning incense to idols.

[Hos. 11:3](#) Yet it is I who taught Ephraim to walk,
I took them in My arms;
But they did not know that I healed them.

[Hos. 11:4](#) I led them with cords of a man, with bonds of love,
And I became to them as one who lifts the yoke from their jaws;
And I bent down and fed them.

[Hos. 11:5](#) They will not return to the land of Egypt;
But Assyria—he will be their king

Because they refused to return to Me.

Hos. 11:6 The sword will whirl against their cities,
And will demolish their gate bars
And consume them because of their counsels.
And they do not know the LORD.

- In an fascinating twist, God is preparing to bring judgment against Israel for its unbelief by using the very same people who received His mercy as Israel's conquerors
 - Hosea says the Assyrians will become Israel's king, Israel's dominator and oppressor
 - These Assyrians are the Ninevites
 - The same people Jonah has been sent to save, albeit a couple of generations later
 - Because one greater than Jonah has come
 - Jesus will send His apostles to the Gentiles of the Roman empire
 - These Gentiles will receive mercy while the nation of Israel persecutes the church
 - Later it would be this very same nation of Gentiles who God will use to destroy the nation and the temple in AD 70
 - A judgment God declared beforehand through Jesus as a consequence for their rejection of the Messiah
- Therefore, the unbelieving generation in Jesus' day will receive a sign – the sign of Jonah
 - And the sign of Jonah is that of a prophet brought back from the dead to declare mercy to a foreign people
 - Even while that prophet's own people reject the message, it is delivered to a foreign people who receive it joyously
 - And when this happens, it is a sure sign that God is preparing to judge His people for their unbelief
 - So, Jesus tells the unbelieving generation before Him that the only sign they are deserving is a sign of judgment

- Now back to Jonah in the fish

[Jonah 2:1](#) Then Jonah prayed to the LORD his God from the stomach of the fish,

[Jonah 2:2](#) and he said,

“I called out of my distress to the LORD,
And He answered me.
I cried for help from the depth of Sheol;
You heard my voice.

[Jonah 2:3](#) “For You had cast me into the deep,
Into the heart of the seas,
And the current engulfed me.
All Your breakers and billows passed over me.

[Jonah 2:4](#) “So I said, ‘I have been expelled from Your sight.
Nevertheless I will look again toward Your holy temple.’

[Jonah 2:5](#) “Water encompassed me to the point of death.
The great deep engulfed me,
Weeds were wrapped around my head.

[Jonah 2:6](#) “I descended to the roots of the mountains.
The earth with its bars was around me forever,
But You have brought up my life from the pit, O LORD my God.

[Jonah 2:7](#) “While I was fainting away,
I remembered the LORD,
And my prayer came to You,
Into Your holy temple.

[Jonah 2:8](#) “Those who regard vain idols
Forsake their faithfulness,

[Jonah 2:9](#) But I will sacrifice to You
With the voice of thanksgiving.
That which I have vowed I will pay.
Salvation is from the LORD.”

[Jonah 2:10](#) Then the LORD commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah up onto the dry land.

- For the first time in the book, we see Jonah praying
 - More than even the content of the prayer, just the fact that Jonah prays is significant
 - Finally, Jonah has been brought low enough, his pride diminished enough, that he’s ready to turn to God
 - We all know how Jonah feels, at least a little
 - When everything else fails, then we turn to God

- When our own efforts fail, we look to God
- He's the safety net rather than the our first option
- What's even more significant is that Jonah waited three days to pray
 - We don't know how long Jonah tossed in the sea before being swallowed, but it probably wasn't long, since Jews usually couldn't swim
 - But it must have taken some time for Jonah to realize that he wasn't going to drown
 - Instead he was going to be slowly digested by a fish
 - This wasn't what he planned.
 - I think of everything in this amazing story, perhaps this is the most striking detail of the story
 - Jonah tosses and turns in a pitch black slimy, stomach of a fish for three days before resorting to prayer
 - I think I would be praying about the time I passed by the fish's tonsils
- But then we consider the content of the prayer
 - The first thing to notice is it is expressed in the past tense
 - Which suggests that the author – who is likely Jonah himself – is recounting what he prayed looking back on the moment
 - This is Jonah's memory of what he prayed while he was in the fish
 - But as we consider the content of the prayer, it becomes clear that at the time Jonah was suffering in the fish, he didn't know that he was in a fish
 - And the past tense viewpoint helps make clear to the reader what was going on in Jonah's mind at the time, as he did not yet understand where he truly was – in a fish
- Look at the content of the prayer – it's not a prayer to be rescued from a fish
 - Scan the prayer
 - First, there are no direct or even indirect references to a fish

- No promises to go to Nineveh
 - If you let me out of this fish I will be good
 - Like a child locked in a room
 - Instead, there are only repeated references to Sheol, to the place of the dead
 - Coupled with statements of how God is our salvation from the judgment of death
 - Now place yourself in Jonah's mind for a moment as he prays this prayer
 - Verse 2
 - Jonah fell into the water and expected to experience death
 - Now he's been alive for some period of time, probably not realizing that three days had passed until he emerged from the fish
 - So he calls out from the depths of Sheol
 - And God heard his voice Jonah says
 - Verse 3
 - He was in the deep or depths
 - He was engulfed by the water
 - Verse 4 & 5
 - Water engulfed him, seaweed entangled him
 - He expressed how he had been expelled from God's sight
 - Presumably having died and now being held in Sheol awaiting the day of his resurrection with the Messiah, to be with God in His temple
 - Verse 6
 - As he was at the root of the mountains, a reference to the supposed location of Sheol in the depths of the earth below the mountains
 - He was in a prison with bars holding him

- The pit of the fish's stomach acting in that way
- Verse 7
 - And as he was fainting away in that terrible environment, he credits the Lord with bringing him his prayer
 - And he knew God heard it
- Verse 8 & 9
 - While the unrighteous worship idols and forsake God
 - Jonah says he will sacrifice to God, give thanks, and give gifts (that which I vowed I will pay)
 - These are the classic signs of repentance and a renewed commitment to walk with God
 - For salvation is from the Lord
- Jonah assumes he has died and is suffering for his unfaithfulness in Sheol
 - And in his distress he feels God's presence and sends up a prayer of repentance
 - And he trusts God to hear it
 - And as God hears it, Jonah feels certain that God receives it
 - What has happened, in a sense, is God has allowed Jonah to experience the world that awaits unbelievers
 - And in that horrible experience, Jonah has come face to face with what it means to experience God's judgment
 - He's allowed Jonah to walk in the shoes of the unbeliever
 - This scene is so reminiscent of the story of Scrooge in A Christmas Carol
 - A man on the road to ruin is given a chance to see what his hard heart could provoke from God
 - And though Jonah was never in jeopardy because he was saved by his faith
 - He has been disobedient in his unwillingness to go to a people God has determined to save

- And his disobedience is born out of a lack of compassion for what these people could experience if they were to go to their graves as unbelievers.
- God not only showed Jonah what the Ninevites needed, but used the experience on the boat to draw a comparison to what he put those men through.
 - Parallels in Chapter 1 and 2
 - Crisis on the sea/Crisis in the fish
 - Sailors praying to Yahweh/Jonah praying to God
 - Sailors delivered from the storm/Jonah delivered from drowning
 - Sailors/Jonah made sacrifices and vows to God
- God's pattern for sin seems to be that the way in which we prefer to sin, He will turn around on us, such that the same kind of sin becomes the punishment by which he will discipline us
 - Where you choose to fall the most, you may see the most consequence coming back in like manner
 - Shows us our own faults by letting us look in a mirror
- So are we thinking that Jonah is past the bad point? Well let's keep reading and studying next week ...