

Some words about the fish that swallowed Jonah

First of all, the subject of this story, even this sentence, is not the fish, but the LORD. The LORD appointed the fish. The LORD spoke to the fish. The LORD is continuing to pursue Jonah. It is His plan, His design, His sovereign work that calls forth the fish from the deep to swallow up His prophet. This is a story about Him.

Secondly, it was not necessarily a whale, or even a fish as we would think of it. The Hebrew term is the generic term for “fish of the sea”, which could refer to any marine animal. Even with this point, however, we must come to terms with the truth that this story is not meant to be explained “scientifically”. This story is miraculous. Whether it was a whale, a fish, or an unknown sea monster that is now extinct is beyond the point. Three days and three nights in the belly of any animal would kill a man. That Jonah survived is not due to the properties of the stomach lining of sharks or whale sharks or the like. It is due to the miraculous grace of God. Many “scholars” deny the historicity of Jonah because they, by presupposition, deny the possibility of the miraculous.

If you have a hard time believing that a fish could swallow man and that this man would live, then you'll have a really hard time believing that a man could die and be raised from the dead, which is how Jesus relates this story. It is important to note that Jonah was an historical figure mentioned in 2 Kings as prophet during Jeroboam's reign. Also, Jesus relates this story as historical and true as a warning that the people of Nineveh would stand up and condemn his generation for their lack of repentant faith. Thusly, this story is intended by God as a pointer within history of the God-Man who would spend three days and three nights in the heart of the earth to be miraculously raised from the dead to bring us life (Matt 12:38-41).

The point here is that God works the miraculous by His own sovereign power and He saves by His own sovereign grace. This fish was prepared to save Jonah. It was swimming nearby this boat because God had willed it to be nearby. This sovereign power of God is evident, not only in the commanding of the fish, who obeys, but in the work of His prophet's heart, who disobeyed. God always lands His man.

And in this part of the story we see that God is preparing Jonah for His mission to the Ninevites. Jonah is a missional book. It begins with God's heart to reveal Himself to a “wicked and great city”, those who do not know Him. But before His prophet can bring His message, he must be humbled to truly appreciate the glories of God's grace.

So it is with us. Before we can truly testify to the greatness of God's grace, not only to the people that we are like, but to the people to whom we are called, those unlike us, cruel to us, enemies of us, we must treasure the grace of God. Jonah learns, through his own personal rescue by grace, that God is the God of salvation. It is this knowledge that sends Him forward to preach hope to the Ninevites.

Fulfilling God's call to Mission Begins with a Deep, Personal Reliance upon the LORD

1. Jonah cried out for personal rescue

- a. Jonah PRAYED!!
 - i. Interestingly, this is not something that we've seen him do throughout this book
 - ii. Even when the captain called him up to pray to his god, we do not see Jonah praying...just coming up with his own plan to be thrown overboard
 - iii. He doesn't bother to ask the LORD, he figures that he knows what's best
- b. He cried out for rescue
 - i. Quotes Psalm 18:4-6
 - ii. In the moment of his distress, what came to mind was the Word of God
 1. Have we spent enough time in the promises of God that they, Scripture, are what we cry out?
 2. Are we "submerged" in them during the times of relative ease, so that in times of distress we know them?
 - iii. Jonah would have cried out for rescue as he was sinking, not from within the fish
 1. Note the past tense words used in his prayer
 2. His prayer from within the fish is really one of praise for the LORD's salvation
 3. The rescue that God sent was the fish: the fish is the salvation from the deep, not the judgment itself
 - iv. God rescued Jonah with an uncomfortable salvation, but Jonah doesn't seem to lament that fact
 1. It had to be uncomfortable to be inside of a fish, squeezed and dark
 2. He is simply overjoyed to be saved from the surety of death (Sheol) and a watery grave
- c. He was humbled by God's discipline and by God's grace
 - i. Jonah also knew that all the troubles that he had run into were from the LORD, for He is sovereign
 1. "You had cast me into the deep"
 2. "All Your breakers and billows passed over me"
 3. "I have been expelled from Your sight..."
 - ii. Jonah also knew that God had graciously heard his prayer and answered him with hope and goodness
 1. "you answered me"
 2. "I will look on your holy temple again"
 3. "you brought my life up from the pit, O LORD my God"
 - a. Note the "my"
 - b. Jonah has returned to the presence of His God

2. Jonah repudiates trying to find his rescue elsewhere

- a. I believe that this reference to himself, a reminder of his foolishness in trusting in boats and money and himself
- b. Vain = empty
 - i. Powerless pretenders of God
 - ii. Idols promise deliverance from circumstance and trouble, but they are powerless to save
 1. Jere 10
 2. Isa 44
- c. God-honoring missional living requires a repudiation of anything that we rely upon for success or to fix a situation (salvation)
 - i. Jonah's mission must begin here
 - ii. Our mission must begin here as well
 1. What do we functionally trust in to bring "success" in our sharing of the gospel?
 - a. Methods?
 - b. Relationship?
 - c. Our niceness?
 2. What do we functionally portray to our neighbors as what brings them hope?
 - a. Better job?
 - b. Less government?
 - c. Just going to church?

3. Jonah's Rescue and His Mission of Rescue is Based Upon the Greatness of God's Love

- a. Jonah responds to the LORD's salvation with thanksgiving and commitment to His will
- b. Jonah remembers that salvation belongs to the LORD
 - i. When Jonah lost hope, it was because he doubted the love of God?
 1. "My circumstances show that God doesn't really love me?"
 2. In the midst of our struggles, we wrestle with the same question: "Does God really love me?"
 - ii. It is when Jonah acknowledges that "salvation belongs to the LORD" in his humility that the LORD sends him back to do great things
 1. Often we think that God will only use us when we've done well, when we've been "good" and we erroneously believe that we are completely worthless to Him when we've failed, fallen, filthied ourselves
 2. But the overwhelming grace of God is so much deeper than that!
- c. God's salvation is based upon the greatness of His love, not the greatness of our love
 - i. Sometimes we fear sharing God's love because we don't value it all that much
 1. We believe that we're too bad, so what do we have to offer the world?
 2. We believe that God is still angry with us, so what do we have to offer the world?

3. We don't share the hope of the gospel of grace because we aren't believing that God's grace is all that amazing!
- ii. Jonah's commitment to the LORD's intent will not last. He will fail before the end of the book
- iii. But God's love of Jonah and of the Ninevites is not contingent upon the perfection of Jonah's love or Jonah's repentance or Jonah's obedience, but upon the perfection and strength of His own sovereign love
- d. Therefore, let us look at that love so that our love is a response to the greatness of His gracious love: **ROMANS 8:1-4**
 - i. The gospel is not merely that God looks past your sin, but rather that He has declared you righteous, not guilty, perfect, spotless, blameless in Christ!
 - ii. It doesn't matter who you are or where you've been. It doesn't matter how dirty or filthy or ruined that you have been. Jesus makes you clean. By the power of His death and the victory of His risen life, He makes you spotless, blameless, righteous, prepared for the presence of the Holy God.
 - iii. When you receive Christ, you belong to Him. You are His! Who could possibly condemn you? There is no more condemnation in Him! In what court could they possibly condemn you? Everything is His! You are His! Who can ever pull you from the palm of His hand?! **NOBODY!!**
 1. "Who will bring any charge against God's elect? It is GOD who justifies!" (Rom 8:33)
 - iv. You have been rescued from condemnation, swallowed up by the love of Christ, pulled from the crushing waves of worthlessness, emptiness, and guilt for He stands for you.
- e. **GOSPEL COMMUNION:** ushers forward to pass out both elements at the same time.
 - i. **REMEMBER HIM** and the depth of His great love:
 1. "He loves us, forgives us, makes us clean"
 2. Because of Christ and His Cross and risen life, there is no more wrath for those who entrust themselves to Him! It was poured out on Christ on that cross and His resurrection at the end of those three days and nights is what proves that there is no more wrath, for we are justified in Him (Rom 4:25)
 3. there is no more condemnation because God so loved you that He sent His Son to die your death and call you his child, perfect, spotless, blameless, righteous, **BELOVED** of GOD
 - ii. **REST IN HIM**
Psalm 116:1-7
I love the LORD, because he has heard my voice and my pleas for mercy. 2 Because he inclined his ear to me, therefore I will call on him as long as I live. 3 The snares of death encompassed me; the pangs of Sheol laid hold on me; I suffered distress and anguish. 4 Then I called on the name of the LORD: "O LORD, I pray, deliver my soul!" 5 The LORD is gracious, and righteous; our God is merciful. 6 The LORD preserves the simple; when I was brought low, he saved me. 7 Return, O my soul, to your rest; for the LORD has dealt bountifully with you.