

A Whale of a Tale

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Bible Verse: Jonah 1:17
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Well, it's well known that Jesus in one of the more familiar passages in the New Testament, explained what the great commandment of the law was. A lawyer had approached him, asked him a question and testing him in the Gospel of Matthew 22, and he said, "Teacher, what is the greatest commandment or what is the great commandment in the law?" And Jesus quoted to him from the book of Deuteronomy and he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and the foremost commandment." I think it's interesting that the Lord called to his attention that the great commandment includes loving the Lord with all of your mind; that our minds as believers in Christ are to be submitted to him, submitted to his authority, submitted to his word, letting our perspective on life, letting our perspective on the world around us, being shaped and informed by what Scripture says so that the word of God becomes the authority not only for our behavior but becomes the authority for the way that we think.

This is crucial and fundamental to the reality of being a Christian and understanding the nature of true redemption. In a similar way in the book of Romans, the Apostle Paul says for us to be transformed by the renewing of your mind. If you look at Romans 12 with me, this is all just by way of introduction to what I have to say here today, in Romans 12:2, the Apostle Paul says,

2 ... do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

Scripture is addressed preeminently and foremost to our minds. It is addressed to the way that we think, not preeminently and first and foremost to the way that we feel, not first and foremost to what we do because what we do and the way that we feel is driven by the way that we think.

Now in our day and age and in the spirit of our world, this is really becoming an increasingly odd manner of thinking, an odd way to approach life as we deal with media that is just designed to manipulate us emotionally, as perhaps some of us have come out of church backgrounds that were just a matter of strict rules and regulations apart from any real serious Bible teaching, any real serious thought, any real serious and earnest

engagement with the nature of theology, with the nature of Christian thought. But Scripture makes it plain to us in things that are just very evident that preeminent in our love for Christ, preeminent in obedience to God, is bringing our mind into submission to him, bringing our mind into submission to his word. That's really really crucial for us as we turn back to the book of Jonah here this morning. We've been teaching through the book of Jonah and I invite you to turn there for our text for this morning. It might surprise you that I opened with that perspective as we come to the end of Jonah 1 but I find it to be most helpful for us to think rightly and Christianly, if I can put it that way, about the text before us today.

Jonah 1, beginning in verse 17, which that single verse will be our text for this morning. Jonah 1:17 says,

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.

Now you know the background, you know what led up to this because we've been speaking about this over the prior couple of weeks or so. The Lord commanded Jonah to go to Nineveh but Jonah rejected that idea, defied the Lord and got on a ship going the opposite way in the Mediterranean Sea. It wasn't long before the Lord hurled a great storm on the sea to hinder the movement of the ship and to stop Jonah from his effort to run away from the Lord and his call to go to the city of Nineveh to preach against it. You know the story. The storm got worse and worse, finally the sailors threw Jonah overboard at his instigation in order to stop the storm. Look at verse 13 with me, Jonah 1:13,

13 ... The men rowed desperately to return to land but they could not, for the sea was becoming even stormier against them. 14 Then they called on the LORD and said, "We earnestly pray, O LORD, do not let us perish on account of this man's life and do not put innocent blood on us; for You, O LORD, have done as You have pleased." 15 So they picked up Jonah, threw him into the sea, and the sea stopped its raging.

Now last week we looked at this parenthetical kind of closing of one storyline here, what happened to the sailors. Verse 16,

16 Then the men feared the LORD greatly, and they offered a sacrifice to the LORD and made vows.

We saw last time why we believe very strongly that these sailors were genuinely converted to the true God, and we have those copies on CD for you out on the round table there if you missed that message. But today we come back and we pick up the story of what happened to Jonah. In verse 16, you're kind of waiting as you read that, Jonah has just been tossed into a raging sea that suddenly turned to glass when he hit the water and, you know, what's happening to Jonah while the story is unfolding about the sailors? Well, verse 17 picks it up for us. Look at it with me again so that it's really set in our mind,

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.

Now as we've been saying all along through this teaching on Jonah, we understand that the story of the great fish is kind of what most people associate with this book and we've tried to give a different sense about the primary thrust of the message of Jonah, that it's not about the fish, that God himself is the hero of the book of Jonah. God himself is the focus of the book of Jonah and in the capacity of his sovereign compassion to save sinners, he sends Jonah to Nineveh because he has an intention to save the people of Nineveh through Jonah's preaching and he saves Jonah here from drowning, he saved the sailors; in all of this great sovereign compassion, God is acting in time in order to accomplish spiritual purposes for the advance of his kingdom and the beginning of the extension of his kingdom, his spiritual kingdom into the lives of Gentiles, and Jonah here is an important part of it.

So Jonah has been thrown into the sea and now he's in the water and what's going to happen to this man who apparently is not a very good swimmer? What happens is this, is that God carries out a sovereign rescue of Jonah. He appointed a fish to swallow Jonah in order to keep Jonah from drowning in the sea. The fish was not punishment on Jonah, as you'll see in chapter 2 next week, the fish was a measure of mercy from God to Jonah to save him from drowning. And there's been a lot of speculation over the years, what kind of fish was this, we're not going to spend any time on that. The word "fish" here is the common Hebrew word for fish, it's the Hebrew word "dag." That's right, in Hebrew a dag is a fish. But the Old Testament does not distinguish species of fish by name, it simply says that this was a great fish, a large fish, large enough to swallow a man whole, and despite a lot of speculation over the years, we don't know what kind of fish this might have been. It's not told for us in the text. The fish, you see, as we've been saying all along, the fish is not the point of the story.

It is not important to know what kind of fish it was. We know enough to know that there were certainly sea creatures large enough in the Mediterranean waters to swallow a man whole but it's not the point of the story. We know something more important than what kind of sea creature this was, far more important than trying to identify it as though we were looking for a plaque in an aquarium someplace to know exactly what it is. You see, as we love the Lord our God with all of our mind, part of the way that we show that love, the way that we exercise that love is to focus our attention on what he has actually said in the text rather than being distracted by extraneous issues that are not called to our attention. If we needed to know, the Scriptures would have told us. It's enough to know that it was a great fish and as I said, we know something far more important than the species of this kind of fish, we know this: we know that this sea creature was the right size, in the right place, at the right time, and in the right way opened its mouth to swallow Jonah, and we know that that perfect fish was there at the perfect time because the Lord had appointed it for that purpose. Look at the verse with me again in verse 17. You see, the Lord is the focus here. The Lord is the one acting here, "the LORD appointed a great fish to swallow Jonah." God in his sovereignty, God in his majesty, God in his control over every aspect of his creation, his control over the sea, his control over Jonah, his

control over the boat, his control over the sailors, his control over the creatures of the sea orchestrates everything to bring that precise occurrence described in verse 17 to pass at exactly the right time.

Now in the big picture of the message, the story, the narrative of Jonah, ultimately what God is doing here is he is enforcing his command to Jonah to go to Nineveh. Don't lose sight of that. God had purposed for Jonah to go to Nineveh to preach and God's will was not going to be hindered by the disobedience of his prophet, and so he brings sovereign discipline to bear upon Jonah's life, he brings this storm to bear upon the sea knowing full well in advance exactly what he's going to do. What he's going to do is he is going to bring a miraculous deliverance of Jonah from drowning in order to accomplish his will; that beyond Jonah's sinking into the sea, beyond the fish, beyond being swallowed, beyond the fish ejecting Jonah later on, God intends for Jonah to be in Nineveh. That's going to happen and the fish is a means for that to take place.

Now let's think further about what we see here. You know, we don't have much experience with fish swallowing men whole, do we? This is not common and we understand that critics of Scripture, mockers of what we believe, and say that this is a fable, this is so ridiculous, this is so absurd that this is unworthy of serious thought. One commentator explaining that mindset said this, he said, "These critics, it is suggested by them, they say that this is no sober account of reality but rather a flight of fancy on the part of the author who never intended his work to be treated as a serious piece of historical narrative. It was composed primarily to entertain and amuse the reader." This is what happens when Scripture falls into the hands of unregenerate men. They begin to mock and make accusations and to treat it and to explain it away, to say it's not true, this is not what it really means, that a fish doesn't swallow and man and, therefore, we have to think something else about it.

Well, beloved, that introduces us to what I really want to talk about here today. You may not realize, you may not have thought about it this way, but in Jonah 1:17, there is far more at stake than the story of Jonah being swallowed by a fish. Beloved, there is nothing less at stake here in Jonah 1:17 than our ability and our commitment to think as biblical Christians. It's no less than that. What do we do as believing people, what do we do as Christians committed to the word of God, what do we do when we see something like this, something so magnificent, so outside the realm of normal human experience, what do we do with it? You know, at one level, I suppose, that a weaker Christian might be embarrassed by the fact that something like this is in Scripture, realizing that to say, "I believe this," is going to hold him up to mocking and scorn from those around him, those in his workplace, those in his family perhaps. We recognize that. Are we to deny it? Are we to change the story so as to excuse ourselves from that bit of mockery? Or perhaps is our goal here to explain this away so that it's supposedly easier for people to believe the Bible and in a misguided sense kind of soften the edges of the miraculous nature of Scripture so that it's more acceptable to the "enlightened modern mind." On the transcript, don't miss the air quotes that I gave to that.

What are we going to do with this? I have three points for this morning and we'll try to explain the text as we go along but, beloved, this is really really critical. How you respond to this is a measure of the way that you use your mind. You know, we're used to thinking about the fact, you know, you get into religious realms and to spiritual areas, we understand that we are to, you know, that we shouldn't sin with our bodies. We understand that even if we do it, even if you violate that, you understand that, but I'm convinced and I'm concerned here this morning that it's not as clear to us that the God who gave us our bodies in order to glorify him with our bodies, as Scripture says, also gave us our minds and we are to use our minds in order to advance the glory of God and that we are to think rightly and that we are to think in a way that is in submission to the Lordship of Christ, in submission to God's word, and when Scripture presents us with something like this, it's a reality check, it's a gut check for us to say what are we going to do with this? In much the same way as we look on elements of creation and we wonder how it fits with prevailing modern presuppositions of millions of years and all of that stuff and the theory of evolution and all of that stuff, what are we going to do with our minds to make sure that the way that we think and the way that we understand the world around us is consistent with Scripture? We reject out of hand the sense, the temptation, the demand by some in professing Christian circles that we should think in accordance with and we should teach in accordance with a mindset that is acceptable to the world at large. We're going to show you why today we don't accept that, why we don't do that. We embrace the fact, in fact we love the fact, we rejoice in the fact that to be a Christian is to have a mind that has been delivered from the darkness of the world and that has implications on a lot of things. So here's what we want to do. We're going to expand a little bit outside of the book of Jonah and then land back there at the end of the message here today.

So what do you do when Scripture presents something miraculous? First of all, you do this: remember your presuppositions, or let's talk about it collectively, we remember our presuppositions. We remember our presuppositions. Now, people from every level of intellectual ability from the lowest to the highest, people think based on presuppositions whether they realize it or not. And what are presuppositions? Well, stated simply presuppositions are the assumptions that we make about the world. We take our presuppositions for granted as we evaluate truth claims, and so we just assume either we assume the existence of God or someone assumes the nonexistence of God contrary to the testimony of their own conscience. Why is it that critics would scoff at this verse? Why is it that critics would scoff at the idea of the Lord appointing a great fish to swallow Jonah? That's a crucial question. Why would they do that? Why would they look at the word of God and accuse it of being deceitful, accuse the writer of the book of Jonah of lying, telling us that something happened that really did not happen? Well, beloved, when you sort through it all, it comes down to this: critics scoff against the Scripture in large part because they are relying upon their own opinion, their own judgment, and their own reason to evaluate truth claims, and the fact that they find it unreasonable, the fact that they find it outside their experience, outside what they believe to be true, therefore they say because it's outside of my realm of judgment, then I declare it to be false according to what I believe. Now that can be informed by PhD studies or it can be nothing more than just an unbelieving half-drunk skeptic laughing at God's word, but at root they are saying,

"I have a judgment that I will exercise independent of the Scriptures, and based on my judgment, I declare it to be untrue. I mock it as something unworthy of rational thought."

Well, what do we think about that? What do we say about that? We have to think biblically, beloved, and I invite you to turn to the book of Ephesians here to remember something really really crucial and fundamental, and why we as Christians should not be intimidated by that and why we should not bend our judgments to satisfy unbelieving men in their mocking of God's word. We have to understand the nature of their minds so that we are not intimidated by them, even if they have longer and better degrees after their name than we do.

Ephesians 4:17 speaks and describes the nature of the unbelieving mind. Ephesians 4:17 says, the Apostle Paul says,

17 So this I say, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind, 18 being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart; 19 and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness.

Now stop there for a moment and take in, if you will, God's assessment of the unbelieving mind. The unbelieving mind is characterized by darkness. It is separated from the life of God. It is a mind of ignorance. It is a mind of hardness of heart. It is a mind that is futile. And we say that with the full understanding that all of us were once there; that we once shared in that darkness of mind. We once were dead in our sins and our trespasses. It was our mind, it was our understanding that was dark, it was our ignorance, it was our hard heart. So we say these things not so much in a disparaging way but just to get to the truth of the matter. Why is it that people write books to attack the authority of Scripture, to undermine the confidence of believers in Scripture? Why do they do that? Well, it's a product of their darkened futile minds and we need to understand that, to understand two things: first of all, why would they mock the account of Jonah? Well, Jonah's experience is outside of theirs and since they have this presupposition, this assumption that their experience is the sum total of what can be true and it's outside their experience, therefore, they exclude it from the possibility of a reasonable truth claim.

Don't you see, beloved, that their judgment about Jonah does not affect us because we understand that a darkened mind, a blind guide, is not someone to lead us in thinking, those of us who have been born again by the Spirit of Christ, those of us who have a renewed mind given to us by the Holy Spirit, those of us who are new creatures in Christ? We think differently than they do. We accept that. We embrace that. We thank God for that, that a new mind has been given to us that is renewed according to the Spirit of holiness and according to the Spirit of truth. So we think differently than they do and we're not ashamed of that, we're not embarrassed by that, we humbly thank God for that.

We see facts and we assess them differently because a new mind has been given to us. We think by the word of God.

Look at verse 20 there of Ephesians 4 when he says in contrast to this darkened mind of unsaved Gentiles, he says to us, "But you." Strong contrast. It's different for you in the body of Christ. You don't have that mind anymore. You're not in futility. You're not in darkness but you, something different applies to you, verse 20,

20 But you did not learn Christ in this way, 21 if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him, just as truth is in Jesus,

He says, "Look, beloved, you think differently. Your mind is driven by different truth. You have a new life within you. You have heard the Gospel of Christ. Beloved, the Holy Spirit has opened your mind, has opened your eyes. The scales have fallen off of your eyes and so now you understand." There is a reason why we sing in Amazing Grace, "I once was blind but now I see." Another hymn says there are things, "There are hues that Christ-less eyes have never seen." We think differently because a new mind has been given to us, a mind that has been renewed by the truth of Scripture, the truth of Christ, by the true teaching that we have received; as we have heard Christ and we have been born again, part of the thing that's happened is we're new creations and as new creations we think differently. We understand in new ways. That has a fundamental informing and formative principle in our mind that is absolutely essential for us in Christian living and it's this: we as believers in Christ, we trust God's word more than we trust the opinions of men. We trust God's word more than we trust our own opinions.

Here's what we do. It is inevitable, beloved, that there is going to be a conflict between the thinking and declarations of Scripture and the thinking and declarations of men. That's inevitable. We're not of this world. Christ is not of this world. His kingdom is not of this world. It's inevitable that there is going to be conflict and for the Christian, there is something that has been settled in our thinking that we need to nurture and to mature. It means that we trust Scripture more than we trust our own opinions. If there is a difference between the way that I think and what Scripture says, it's not that Scripture that is wrong, it means that my mind needs to be renewed, my mind needs to be conformed more closely to Scripture rather than finding myself in a position of pride and arrogance or embarrassment, God forbid, at Scripture and, "Let's close the Bible before we get to that part." Or to yield before unbelieving men, to be embarrassed by God's word. No, we don't think that way.

You see, there is something so fundamental in our approach. We realize, beloved, I never get tired of saying stuff like this, and for those of you that keep coming, apparently you're not tired of hearing it either, for which I praise God, but we understand something really essential, we understand that when we open this book, we are opening the book of life. We understand that it is when this book is opened that the Lord Jesus Christ is revealed to us. We realize that it is in the Lord Jesus Christ alone that we can find salvation from our sin, from our darkness. So we love this book. We love the Christ that this book reveals. We submit ourselves to it not simply because we have to, we do have to but we want to.

We gladly yield our mind to this book. We gladly yield our lives to defend this book, to proclaim this book, to teach this book, as individuals, as a church. This is what we gladly do. We're not interested in conforming to the world because we realize that the world is in futility and was leading us on a path that would have resulted in our eternal destruction. By contrast, what's happened to us is that God in sovereign compassion, there's that theme from Jonah again, God in sovereign compassion rescued us, saved us, adopted us into his family so that we would be his own, that we would belong to him; and in obedience and in gratitude to that saving work of God, in obedience and gratitude to Christ who paid the price for our salvation, we bring all of ourselves into submission to him, all of our mind, all of our soul, all of our affections. That's what we do as Christians and that's the great presupposition, multifaceted presupposition that we bring to the way that we think about all of life. So when we come to God's word and we see Jonah 1:17, we say, "Well, of course. That's what happened. That's what the Bible says. That's what happened. What's the discussion here?" Because, you see, it's already been settled for us in advance that we accept what Scripture affirms to be true. When it makes historical assertions, we accept them as true as the very nature of things because a prior matter has been settled for us. Scripture informs our mind about what is true.

So we remember our presuppositions and we look at this and say, "Yeah, a fish swallowed Jonah. Isn't that great, that God is so great and powerful that he can do that? Isn't it great that God had such sovereign compassion on Jonah, on Nineveh? He had this great plan and, you know, the God who can speak the world into existence, Genesis 1, you know, if he can speak the universe into existence, a fish isn't really a problem." So we have to think that way. This is really what we just covered, it's really really essential to our life in Christ. So we remember our presuppositions.

Point 2 here: we respect the history. We respect the history. You know, beloved, the book of Jonah is writing about events that happened over 2,700 years ago and in the intervening millennia, currents of thought have come and gone and we're products of the spirit of our age. We realize that we live in a skeptical age, a mocking age, an age that denies the very concept of truth, let alone individual facts of historical truth, so we have to be aware generally of the fact that we live in a skeptical age. That affects us, perhaps, more than we realize, I'm sure that it does, but this gives us an opportunity to step out of the mindset of our world and to respect the history that's recorded for us in God's word.

You know, think about it this way, think about it this way: the book of Jonah has survived throughout the course of 2,700 years of human history. It has been preserved for us in that manner, now having been translated into the language in which we think and speak and we realize that in addition to everything else we were saying about the Gospel of Christ and our salvation, to just realize as a purely historical matter, to have in front of us something that was written 2,700 years ago, so compelling, so great, and that we have something like that in front of us to read and to engage our minds in, we realize this is a pretty great privilege that we have, something that ancient preserved for us and alive for us here today. So we start with a respect for the text that's been preserved for us as a starting point, and yet we take it a step further and we say we accept the account of Jonah as being historical, we accept what it says to be true, including the story of the great fish.

Well, here's the next step in the process here of defending the text, of understanding the text, of coming to a mature response to this text, this is possible, this is what's raised against it, this question might be asked: have we misunderstood the intent of the author? Are we taking him, are we assuming that he's saying something historical when in actuality that's not what he intended at all? There are men who try to make that case and to say that this is just a parable, this is just an allegory, he never intended us to take him seriously. These men would say if Jonah was here today, whoever wrote Jonah, in their distorted minds, if the writer was here he'd say, "No, guys, you've got it all wrong. I never meant you to take this seriously. I was just telling a story to convey a spiritual truth." And these modern day writers would say, "It's just a work of fiction. Can't you read? Don't you know the difference between fiction and history? What's the matter with you?"

So they do this, they nod in the direction of biblical authority, they say, "Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah, I believe in the authority of Scripture," while they wink to their unbelieving friends as they're misleading you. "I believe in biblical authority, it's just that this is not a factual account of what happened." What would we say to that attack on the work of Jonah? Well, we'd say, "No." No, Jonah is historical narrative by which we mean this, Jonah, the book of Jonah, tells us what happened. It doesn't come to us in the story of a fanciful tale of allegories. You've read allegories in the past, some of the writings of different men. You know when they're talking in allegory. Jonah doesn't present itself in that way, particularly as it pertains to the story of the great fish. There is nothing in the text that suggests to us that the writer wants us to take the fish as something symbolic. In fact, he describes the fish doing the things that fish do. It swallows. It swims. It's in the sea. It burps, if I can put it that way, later on in the story.

Beloved, as we've been saying all along and it's to your benefit that you've been here as we've been talking about this, I've been saying all along, saying so often and now it really becomes important, that the fish is incidental to the story of Jonah. Absolutely true. Happened exactly as Scripture says but the book of Jonah was not written to talk about the fish, per se. There are, I believe, 48 verses in the book of Jonah, at least in our English text there are 48. You can do the math real quick if you're inclined that way. I'll wait. "17 + 10 = 27, +10 = 37, +11 = 48. Got it. Okay, I'm with you, preacher." Why would I say that, mention 48 verses? The fish in Jonah is only mentioned in 3 verses. This verse, chapter 1, verse 17; chapter 2, verse 1, look at it with me, "Jonah prayed to the LORD his God from the stomach of the fish." Third and final reference to the fish, verse 10, "the LORD commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah up onto the dry land." That's it. That's it. The fish is incidental to the story. The reason that we think, the reason that until now we thought that the fish was the big deal was because that's what's always talked about. That's what some of us grew up with in flannel graphs in Sunday school and stuff like that, and in superficial teaching just designed to entertain children the word of God was reduced to something other than what it actually is. This fish is not the point of the story. It's a minor player in the overall course of what Jonah is talking about here.

There's another reason why we treat it. First of all, okay, so why do we consider this to be real time and space history? 1. The book presents itself that way. Secondly, the story of

the fish is incidental. It's not given in elaborate spectacular fashion about what happens. It doesn't describe in weird detail what supposedly happened. What about the stomach juices around Jonah? There's none of that. There's none of that that would give the story an extreme take. Thirdly, we won't turn there because we talk about it so often, elsewhere in the Old Testament the Old Testament treats Jonah as a historical person. You'll remember in 2 Kings 14, Jonah was a prophet of Israel whose ministry is described in the context of historical kings. So what we have here is this: we have in the book of Jonah a historical narrative about a historical person described in historical ways, in the context of the word of God. So what do we do? We treat it as historical narrative, as historically accurate, that this is what happened.

But do you know what? As we respect the history – ah, this is where it gets really good. All the rest of this has just been appetizers, now we get to the main course. Do you know what settles it for us as a Christian, that this real fish really swallowed Jonah and Jonah really was in the stomach of the fish for three days and three nights, do you know what really settles that for us? It's far more than just judgments about historical narrative. Men will fight us on that. It's far more than just the fact that Jonah is described elsewhere in the Bible in the Old Testament. What settles it for us is something infinitely higher, something that takes it beyond our realm of judgment. Beloved, it takes it into a realm where our contrary opinions are forbidden, are not allowed to think anything else. What settles it for us is our Lord Jesus Christ.

Look at the Gospel of Matthew 12 with me. Matthew 12, beginning in verse 38. Oh, do I like this! And oh, do I consider it a privilege to do what I do. Matthew 12:38,

38 Then some of the scribes and Pharisees said to Him [meaning to Jesus Christ], "Teacher, we want to see a sign from You." 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; 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."

Beloved, that's a showstopper. That settles everything. You could forget everything I said about presuppositions, you could forget everything I said about the nature of historical narrative and allusions to other things in the Scriptures and from 2 Kings, you could settle all of that or you could set all of that aside, you shouldn't but we're building up to a climax here where everything is consistent and now our capstone, the climax is found in the words of our Lord Jesus Christ himself. He who is the eternal Son of God, he who is the Lord of Glory, he who is omniscient, who knows everything, affirmed that Jonah was swallowed by the fish. Jesus Christ is Lord. He is Lord over everything. He is Lord over truth. He is Lord over creation. He is Lord over men. He is Lord over thought and Jesus Christ affirmed that Jonah was swallowed by the fish.

Let's think about this within the context of the body of Christ, think about this within your realm as an individual believer. Who is Christ to you? He is Lord. Who is Christ to

you? He's my teacher. Who is Christ to you? He is my Shepherd, he leads me in the truth. You see, beloved, your attitude toward Christ, the Word Incarnate, settles the matter for you. How did Jesus Christ use the account of Jonah? He didn't treat it as an allegory. He didn't treat it as a parable. In fact, he did something really significant, he used the story, the account of Jonah in the Old Testament saying that, "That is a picture of my own death, burial and resurrection." What the event of Jonah being swallowed by the fish was a type. It was an event that in itself prophesied of a future happening in the life of Christ. This event of Jonah being swallowed by the fish was a prophetic foreshadowing of death swallowing Christ in the words of our own Lord.

Now think with me about what this means. Let's pause for just a second here. Look at it there again in verse 40 as Jesus uses the indicative mood, a statement of reality. He says, "Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the sea monster." Jesus says, "This is what happened." So again, there is something prior before you ever get to the story of Jonah and the fish, there is something prior that has been settled for you as a Christian. Jesus is the way, the truth and the life, there is no deceit on his lips. It's impossible for God to lie. Jesus said Jonah was there. We say, "Okay, then, what's the issue? Jonah was there." We believe that based on the authority and testimony of Christ himself because otherwise you're saying, 'Well, did Jesus lie? Did Jesus mislead us? Was Jesus mistaken?' All of a sudden you're attacking the very essence of God when you question what happened to Jonah in an unbelieving way.

So what Jesus teaches is something very profound. He says that Jonah's time below the surface of the sea in the belly of the fish prefigured his own time below the surface of the earth in his burial. Just as Jonah came out of the sea, Christ would come out of the grave and the sign to Christ's generation that what Christ said was true, is based on the factual reality of the sign of Jonah. So to deny the historicity of Jonah assigns error to Christ. The resurrection based on a pattern that happened in the life of Jonah, if you take away the historical reality of what happened to Jonah, you are making a direct assault on the resurrection. Don't do that. That's gravely serious. To strike a blow against the historicity of Jonah in light of the way that Christ used it as a prediction of his own death and resurrection, threatens the historicity of the resurrection itself. Beloved, these things are really serious. I hope I'm making that plain. This is no small detail. To threaten the resurrection with your teaching is an existential threat to biblical salvation.

Look at 1 Corinthians 15. These are no incidental matters. 1 Corinthians 15. The resurrection is central to the Gospel. 1 Corinthians 15:1,

1 Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, 2 by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain.

He says, "It's this Gospel by which you are saved, by which you are delivered from sin and eternal judgment in hell forever. This is really important." So Paul says in verse 3,

3 ... I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that [here's the content of the Gospel] Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4 and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures,

There is no Gospel without the resurrection. That's what Paul goes on to say in 1 Corinthians 15:13. Look down there with me. He says,

13 ... if there is no resurrection of the dead, not even Christ has been raised; 14 and if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain.

He says, "Look," okay so, beloved, stay with me. Eye contact please, if you would. Let's reverse engineer this now. We believe in a Gospel in which Christ is resurrected from the dead and that is the basis of our eternal hope. It is on that basis that we hope to live again when we die, to continue living after we die. Paul says that without the resurrection, there is no Gospel. If there is no Gospel, you are still dead in your sins and the resurrection is core to the Gospel. What did Jesus say about his resurrection? He said many things but in part he said, "You'll know I'm the real thing when you see something that mirrors what happened to Jonah. I will die, I will be buried, I will be raised on the third day after a pattern established by the prophet Jonah recorded for you in the Old Testament Scriptures." These things are linked together. If you falsify the beginning of the chain, you ultimately falsify all the rest of it and instead of being here in hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserably to be pitied instead. Christ himself joined his resurrection to the story of Jonah. That means that for you and I, we don't separate them. We accept the historical reality of the resurrection of Christ. Yes, amen. We accept the time of Jonah testified by the word, testified by Christ, and we look at that and with equal authority, with equal assurance, with equal settledness of mind, we say amen to that too.

J. C. Ryle, that great defender of the faith from a prior generation said this, he said, "Let us remember this, if we hear men professing to believe the writers of the New Testament and yet sneering at the things recorded in the Old Testament as if they were fables, such men forget that in so doing they pour contempt on Christ himself. The authority of the Old Testament and the authority of the New stand or fall together." You can't have one without the other and that allows us to see the truth of Jonah's rescue. This really happened. A real prophet, a real man with human flesh like yours and mine was really swallowed, saved from drowning in a sea by a fish that later ejected him so that he would fulfill the mission that God had originally given to him. We remember our presuppositions, we respect the history. I could have made the whole thing about Christ a separate point, probably should have. We remember our Lord in this and we say this really happened. It's more certain that what happened to Jonah is real, that's more certain than whether I'll be alive tomorrow or not. That's settled. This happened. We believe it and we look at Jonah and we realize that it points us forward to Christ and in Christ we see the one who alone can save us from our sins.

So that brings us to our third and final point this morning: to receive the message. To receive the message. What happened here with Jonah at the end of chapter 1 is part of a larger narrative in the book of Jonah. God sovereignly acted in Jonah to bring salvation to many people. He's sovereign. He's sovereign. He has absolute control over all of his creatures and over all of his creation. There's not a rebel molecule that's outside his control anywhere in the universe and when it pleases God to do so, he is completely able to command, to bring under his command portions of his creation to accomplish his purposes. He created the seas and all that is within them so what's the problem with God taking one of those things within it and moving it to the point that it needs to be so that his purposes in Jonah's life would be fulfilled?

Psalm 103:19 says this, he says,

19 The LORD has established His throne in the heavens, And His sovereignty rules over all.

Psalm 115:3,

3 ... our God is in the heavens; He does whatever He pleases.

It pleased God in Jonah to command a fish and so I'd ask you as a preliminary matter, beloved: what do you say about the testimony of Jonah on this very point? What do you say in response to those who would laugh? Your response should be, "I believe the word of God. I believe this happened exactly as God said." And you see, beloved, God's sovereignty is stamped all over the book of Jonah. It's not just the fish. He commanded Jonah to go to Nineveh. He hurled the storm on the sea. He directed the lot to identify Jonah to the sailors. He stopped the storm immediately when Jonah hit the water. He brought spiritual salvation to the sailors. That's just in chapter 1. Then he produces a citywide revival in Nineveh and in chapter 4 we'll read about how he commands a plant, he commands heat and commands other things to happen, commands a worm. Throughout this book, the sovereignty of God is on magnificent display.

Beloved, we don't pick and choose. We don't say, "Well, I can believe in a fast-growing plant but I can't believe in a fish." No, no, no, no, no, it's not given to us. God's word is not presented to you as a cafeteria where you say, "I'll take the turkey but I'm going to pass on the fish." It's not like that. We receive it as the unified whole in which it is given to us and we walk away in awe at the majesty of God. We walk away in the majesty of God. He's sovereign over all, sovereign over all of his creation, sovereign over a fish, but far more than that, our minds are lost in wonder, love and praise at the fact that this sovereign God shows mercy to sinners like us.

Jonah's rescue by the fish displays the sovereign power of God to bring salvation to sinners and as you follow the word of Scripture to its end, we find its culmination in the Lord Jesus Christ, the sovereign work of salvation completed at the cross of Calvary, completed in his burial, completed in his resurrection which testifies to all men for all time that God has accepted the blood sacrifice of Christ as the only means by which

sinners can approach him and have access to him. But in Christ the door is open wide. You see, beloved, ultimately as we read about Jonah in the Old Testament, we are led straight to Christ and in Christ we are left with the question for all of, all of you, all of you on the live stream, all of you: who do you say that Christ is? What do you say about his resurrection? Romans 10:9 and 10 says,

9 ... If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord [in his person and over you personally, he is Lord, he is my Lord], and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead [there is that resurrection theme again], you will be saved; 10 for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation.

Are you here without Christ? Who do you say that he is? Will you repent and believe in him in light of the authority of God's word and the authority of Christ? In light of the loving presentation of Christ given to you in the Gospel?

Let's bow together in prayer.

Lord, we pause for just a moment to quiet our hearts in response to the great authority of Christ. For those of us that know him, Father, thank you for the sovereign compassion, the sovereign mercy that you have shown to us at some point in the past and now as you continue your work unto you call us home. Thank you. We are the beneficiaries of a plan that was not of our making, of a Lord who loved us first and we thank you for that. We pray for the hearts of skeptics, Father, that they might be saved. We pray for the hearts of those with us not in Christ, young people here, high school age, older folks, Father, that have never earnestly responded to you. Now is the day, now is the time, O God, complete the work in their heart that you began by bringing this truth to bear on their conscience. So we look to you, we believe your word, we believe our Lord, we believe knowing that one day we will be with you forever in heaven. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

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