

We are savoring our Savior's use of Jonah as a sign of His power over death - a sign of God's power to resurrect not only Jonah's body from the belly of a great fish, but even the body of His Son after three days' burial. Let us confess that our daily need is for nothing less than daily resurrections from trial, temptation, sin and discouragement. May these notes greatly encourage as well as challenge us this week.

Mon/Tues: Read Jonah 1:11-2:3 and Psalm 120:1

Found in the Fearful Gloom

Jonah begins his prayer at the place of severe chastisement. He confesses (Jonah 2:2) that the belly of the fish was a tight spot of "distress" (i.e., a narrow place or strait; a place of trouble, vexation, darkness, and anguish). But he nevertheless sees it as a place to which God bowed His listening ear to hear and deliver. Using the words of Psalm 120:1, in the belly of the fish Jonah acknowledges his severe trial marvels that God could hear him, even there!

Perhaps the darkest example of such "distress" in the Old Testament is described for us in Isaiah 8:22 as a place of "distress, darkness and fearful gloom." Isaiah is describing the unbelieving, wicked and hardened state of Israel as they prefer to curse their God and die instead of turning in repentance and faith back to their Savior – a terrible place to be!

Such indeed is the situation for Jonah, is it not? What has happened to him in the waters of judgment is solely due to the fact of his rebellion whereby he refuses, *even in the face of death*, to return to Nineveh! As James Boice says, all Jonah had to do as the storm raged was to answer the panic-stricken sailors in Jonah 1:11-12 by telling them to pray and repent of their sins – even as he would pray and ask God to send him back to Nineveh. That would have been the surest way to stop the storm! Why die, Jonah? Simply confess your rebellion and go and do your prophetic duty in Nineveh, as God had commanded. But Jonah is too stubborn and bitter to do such a simple thing. He would rather be thrown over-board. Talk about sinful willfulness - a terrible place of hopelessness to choose!

Meditate and Pray: Let us rejoice that God hears us *at our most undeserving*. Take another example: Where did God's gracious call find Adam after he had eaten the forbidden fruit? Did it come to Adam (as Arminianism teaches) when Adam made a "decision" to make things right with God? No! It was not even a little bit of Adam's own effort... a few steps back towards God... and God then cooperating with Adam in forging a new life of forgiveness! Not at all! God called to Adam while he was *in the midst of his sin... entrapped by Satan in the grips of sin!* God spoke to Adam's dead heart and said, "Live!" In the same way, while Jonah was sinking into a hellish judgment *which he himself had chosen*, God found him and by His Spirit enabled Jonah with his last breaths to utter prayers which God Himself then heard and answered. It was God's effective call of sovereign grace which found Jonah -- All of grace! The same pattern can be seen in the terrible distress of Isaiah 8:22, answered by the free and sovereign light of salvation in Isaiah 9:2. Amen! Praise God for His sovereign grace in finding us at our worst and most rebellious!

Weds/Thurs: Read Jonah 1:1-10**Fear with a Great Fear**

A word should be said about the fear which ran in Jonah's wake. The unwitting sailors suffer terror in the storm brought on by Jonah's sin because he refused to obey and go to Nineveh. They vainly seek to stop the storm by their pagan prayers. When that doesn't work, the captain awakes Jonah in his spiritual torpor and demands that he too cry out to his "god." What a terrible, shameful thing! Jonah is rebuked by a pagan sea captain for his prayerlessness!

Later on, God mercifully transforms the sailors' fear. God spares the ship and returns the sea to a calm. These same sailors' craven terror transforms into a reverent, worshipful calm as they sacrifice offerings of thanksgiving and vows to the one true God, the Lord God of Israel.

This story bears a parallel to the account of the disciples during the storm on the Sea of Galilee (Mark 4:41). When the sea is calmed, the disciples' response is as follows: And they were filled with great fear and said to one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?"

Why did the disciples "fear with a great fear," as Mark literally puts it? Because it was revealed to them something of the great power and awesome deeds of God Himself in the person of Jesus Christ! In other words, more than the storm on the sea, the disciples stood in awe of God Himself as He stood before them in human form! "What kind of man is this?" they exclaim. Ah, it is the God-man – more fearful in His holy power and presence than the terror which even the most violent of storms can produce.

In this too the sailors on the ship with Jonah reflect the disciples. They show more fear at the mention of God's name, as "the LORD, God of heaven, who made the sea and dry land" than they do before the winds of the storm in verse 5! In fact, the Hebrew in Jonah 1:10 exactly mirrors the Greek in Mark 4:41, saying: "They feared with a great fear" when they heard the name of Jonah's God.

But, why, we might ask, were the men terrified at this point, more afraid apparently than they were of the storm itself? The answer is in what they knew of Jonah's God. These were sailors, and as sailors they had undoubtedly traveled from port to port around the Mediterranean and heard many stories of other people and other people's gods. Are we to think that they had never heard of the Hebrew people or of the Hebrew God, Jehovah? Of course they had heard of Him.

He was the God who had brought down the plagues upon the Egyptians so that His people might be led out of Egypt. This was the God who had parted the waters of the Red Sea to allow the Hebrews to escape into the desert and who had then closed the waters on the pursuing Egyptian forces. He had parted the waters of the Jordan river to enable them to cross over into Canaan. He had leveled the walls of Jericho. This was the great God of the Hebrews: and it was this God, not a weak god, who was pursuing them for the sake of Jonah. No wonder the men were terrified! They had come face to face with the true God!

James Boice

Meditate and Pray: Oh may God grant revival in our day! May the nations hear of the might and power of our God and come and fall down before Him in holy repentance and holy fear, and above all holy faith – even as these sailors sought to worship the God of Jonah. Sing about this desire for the nations to fear the Lord, using hymn # 368 (from Psalm 22:27-30):

*The ends of all the earth shall hear
And turn unto the Lord in fear;
All kindreds of the earth shall own
And worship Him as God alone.*

*For His the kingdom, His of right,
He rules the nations by His might;
All earth to Him her homage brings,
The Lord of lords, the King of kings.*

*Both rich and poor, both bond and free
Shall worship Him on bended knee,
And children's children shall proclaim
The glorious honor of His Name.*

*The Lord's unfailing righteousness
All generations shall confess,
From age to age shall all be taught
What wondrous works the Lord has wrought*

Fri/Sat: Read Jonah 2:1-7

Reclaimed from Hell

At some point in Jonah's descent into his watery grave, a point known only to God, who was with Jonah in the deep, the prophet's faith cried out for deliverance, and the Spirit of God, who inspired all the prophets of old, brought to Jonah's mind the exact words of Scripture which could resurrect his faith, even before his body found new life. This is God's mode of operation with the erring, despairing saint – to bring to mind some consoling, hope-giving word of Scripture so that life for the soul springs forth anew out of the very grave into which sin has cast him. Yes, God can reach down and pluck the sinner out of the deepest of tombs, buried under tons of sin and hundreds of feet under the waters of grief! For consider the profound description which Jonah gives us: “from the depths of the grave I called to God for help” (Jonah 2:2).

The word “grave” here is the word “sheol.” It is a terrible word that describes the reality of the sin-accursed existence of after death. Yes, sometimes it merely means “grave,” but it usually carries with it aspects of curse and alienation from God. It is the underworld, the pit, and the very depths of hell; it is the place where the believer begs never to go, for in that “grave” there is no praise of God. It is the place the wicked are sent for punishment; it is the place of no return.

How amazing that Jonah describes himself as being locked up in this terrible place. Beyond drowning, beyond death – in the belly of that fish Jonah feels deeply the *curse* of his sin. No wonder in Jonah 2:4 Jonah concludes that he has been “banished from God's sight.” He believes that by God's hand lifted against his sin, he has been cut off, driven out, expelled, driven away, divorced, put away, thrust away. How terrible, how hopeless in any terms but God's resurrecting grace! Only God could find Jonah in this terrible place.

The proof that God found Jonah even in the belly of hell is this: with the very same breath that he declared his banishment from God's sight, Jonah continues... “But I will look again toward your holy temple.” Only the Spirit of God could bring Jonah back from hell like that and give him hope again!

Meditate and Pray: Let us thank God for His Holy Spirit, able to reclaim us, working faith in us again and again when we give up and even find ourselves sinking towards hell! Sing about such power from the Spirit of God, with us even in the depths of hellish trial, using these words in song from Psalm 139, found in hymn # 36 – especially verses 3 and 5:

*Lord, Thou hast searched me and dost know
Where'er I rest, where'er I go;
Thou knowest all that I have planned,
And all my ways are in Thy hand.*

*My words from Thee I cannot hide,
I feel Thy power on every side;
O wondrous knowledge, awful might,
Unfathomed depth, unmeasured height.*

*Where can I go apart from Thee,
Or whither from Thy presence flee?
In Heav'n? It is Thy dwelling fair;
In death's abode? Lo, Thou art there.*

*If I the wings of morning take,
And far away my dwelling make,
The hand that leadeth me is Thine,
And my support Thy power divine.*

*If deepest darkness cover me,
The darkness hideth not from Thee;
To Thee both night and day are bright,
The darkness shineth as the light.*

Sunday: Read Jonah 2:4-6 and Luke 12:50

Worshiping Jesus for His Descent

To conclude this week, remember that the only reason Jonah could be rescued from the place of curse was that Jesus became accursed for him on the Cross. Jesus endures a complete descent into hell, drinking to the very depths the cup of our curse.

Meditate and Pray: Sing about this great theme of the Gospel – of Jesus being “submerged” under our sin (Luke 12:50), in order to raise us up to a new life of justification and resurrection! Sing # 250:

*Throned upon the awful tree,
King of grief, I watch with thee;
darkness veils thine anguished face,
none its lines of woe can trace.
none can tell what pangs unknown
hold thee silent and alone.*

*Hark, that cry that peals aloud
upward through the whelming cloud!
Thou, the Father's only Son,
thou, his own anointed One,
thou dost ask him (can it be?)
"Why hast thou forsaken me?"*

*Silent through those three dread hours,
wrestling with the evil powers,
left alone with human sin,
gloom around thee and within,
till the appointed time is nigh,
till the Lamb of God may die.*

*Lord, should fear and anguish roll,
darkly o'er my sinful soul,
thou, who once were thus bereft
that thine own might ne'er be left,
teach me by that bitter cry
in the gloom to know thee nigh.*