

The Book of Jonah

Jonah 1:17 – 2:3

Devotion

- **Opening Prayer:** Almighty God, our heavenly Father, without Your help our labor is useless, and without Your light our search is in vain. Invigorate our study of Your holy Word that, by due diligence and right discernment, we may establish ourselves and others in Your holy faith; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.
- **Small Catechism:** How can water do such great things?
- **Hymn:** God's Own Child I Gladly Say It (LSB 594)

Chapter 1:17 – 2:3

Read Chapter 1:17 – 2:10

Lesson Introduction

- Today we continue our “descent” with Jonah.
- Fleeing from the presence of the Lord, we hear that Jonah:
 - Went down to Joppa and found a ship going to Tarshish (1:3).
 - He went down into the inner part of the ship (1:5).
 - He goes down into the waves (1:15).
 - Now he goes down into the belly of a fish (1:17-2:1).
 - He goes down to Sheol (2:2).
- Yet, we will hear of His ascending.

Verse 17 (Chp. 1)

“Yahweh appointed” - יָמַן יְהוָה

- This verb is used four times throughout Jonah (1:17; 6:6, 7, 8).
- In each instance we see God as the agent.
- He is Lord over the sea creatures, the plants, the land, animals, and the wind.
- This points to one of the central motifs of the narrative: Yahweh, not Jonah, controls all things for the purpose of salvation.

- Jonah confesses this in 1:9. Everything obeys God’s call, but does Jonah?

“Yahweh appointed a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.”

- A common question today is, is the story of Jonah fact or fiction?
- It shouldn’t be a surprise that a person was swallowed by a fish.
- What is so interesting is that Jonah survives for three days and three nights.
- Because of this, relatively recently, the story of Jonah is seen as fictitious – an allegory – as opposed to a historical narrative.
- However, we must consider the following:
 - For over two thousand years, most Christians and Jews view the book of Jonah as an historical event.
 - There’s archeological evidence of cities such as Nineveh.
 - The most definitive testimony to the historical accuracy of Jonah rests upon the witness in the NT of our Lord and Savior.
 - Throughout Scripture we see him doing miracles. Why not here?
 - Jesus declares that he is “one greater than Jonah” (Matt. 12:41).
 - Jesus prefaces his connection to Jonah with this comparison: “Just 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” (Matt. 12:40).
 - This comparison assumes that Jonah’s experience was actually history and that Christ’s own resurrection on the third day is just as certainly a historical fact!
- Looking at this verse in its entirety, Luther states:
 - *“Jonah must have thought these the longest days and nights ever lived under the sun. It must have seemed an interminably long time that he sat there in the dark. Yes, I suppose, that he occasionally lay down and stood up. He saw neither sun nor moon and was unable to compute the passage of time. Nor did he know where in the sea he was traveling about with the fish. How often lung and liver must have pained him! How strange his abode must have been among the intestines and the*

huge ribs! However, death was crowding in upon him, and he paid scant attention to the fish. His one thought was: When, when, when will this come to an end?”¹

- *“O God, what a great miracle this is! Who can really comprehend how a man can survive three days and three nights within a fish, in the middle of the sea, all alone, without light and without food, and in the end return to dry land again? That must have been a strange voyage. Who would believe this story and not regard it a lie and a fairy tale if it were not recorded in Scripture?”²*
- *“God proves here that He holds death and everything in His almighty hand and that it is an easy matter for Him to help us even in indescribable and desperate situations. This seems incredible to us. He is present everywhere, in death, in hell, in the midst of our foes, yes, also in their hearts. For He has created all things, and He also governs them, and they must all do as He wills.”³*
- In these section, Luther:
 - Paints for us a picture of Jonah in the big fish.
 - He explains how God governs all things.
 - We also see him defending the historicity of Jonah. These words are given to us by God. They are inspired, written by Him!

Verse 1 (Chp. 2)

“Then Jonah prayed to the LORD his God...”

- The furious action of chapter 1 comes to an end. The storms and waves, panic and fear cease in order to allow Jonah time to pray.
- There are several references to prayer in the four chapters of Jonah:
 - The sailors’ prayer (1:5)
 - Ninevites praying to God in 3:8
 - The captain asking Jonah to call on his God (1:6).
 - Now we see a formal prayer in this chapter

¹ Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works, Vol. 19: Minor Prophets II: Jonah and Habakkuk*, ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann, vol. 19 (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1999), 68.

² Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works, Vol. 19: Minor Prophets II: Jonah and Habakkuk*, ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann, vol. 19 (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1999), 68.

³ Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works, Vol. 19: Minor Prophets II: Jonah and Habakkuk*, ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann, vol. 19 (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1999), 68.

Verse 2

- This verse stands as the introduction to the whole prayer.
- The prayer itself has certain features of language, content and form that are characteristic of Hebrew poetry, of a psalm.
- Because of this, chapter 2 is unique from the other chapters, which is composed in the genre of a narrative.
- We'll see that a lot of the language can be found in the Psalter:
 - surrounded me
 - casting me
- Yet, like the rest of the Book of Jonah, this prayer as a whole is all about dying and rising.

“I called out to the LORD...”

- Here, we see Jonah calling upon Yahweh.
- He's finally following the suggestion of the captain in 1:6, “Arise, call out to your god!”
- Jonah calls out to the Lord because Jonah has been first spoken to.
 - This is how prayer works.
 - God's Word creates faith, and faith therefore calls out to God.
 - Prayer is the cry of faith.

“I called out to the LORD, out of my distress and he answered me; out of the belly of Sheol I cried, and you heard my voice.”

- **QUESTION: Is the great fish an instrument of death or life?**
- Yahweh had in fact granted Jonah deliverance by means of a great fish.
- Yet, Jonah was still in the belly of a great fish.
- He says he was in the belly of Sheol, which is:
 - The place where God is not.
 - The realm of the dead.
 - The underworld.
 - In Acts 2:27 St Peter interprets Psalm 16:10 as spoken by Christ: “Thou dost not give Me up to Sheol...” and he says in v. 24 that God “loosed the pangs of death.”

St. Peter wants us to think of “Sheol” as the pain of death that Christ felt when He died on the cross and when He departed this life and passed into the power of God.

- Jonah descended as low as he can go, which is the path of those who forsake the presence of Yahweh.
- He basically says that he was dead.

- Yet, notice these verbs are in the past tense.
 - Even in the midst of a fish, Jonah speaks with certainty.
 - He says God has answered him. God has heard him. It’s a done deal.
 - In the face of certain death, there’s no guarantee that Jonah will survive being in the fish, Jonah has faith that God has brought about his salvation.
 - For the first time, he finally speaks like a true prophet.

- This is a good example for us.
 - In the face of distress. In the face of bodily death, we have God’s promise that:
 - He hears us. He answers us.
 - For Christ’s sake, eternal salvation and life is ours right now!
 - Luther states that the heart must have sharp eyes, for while it is surrounded by nothing but tokens of God’s anger and punishment, yet it beholds and feels no punishment and anger but only kindness and grace (LW 19, p 73).
 - We must not be distracted by what’s around us, but trust in the certainty of God’s Word, that we have been delivered from death for Christ’s sake.

Verse 3

“...you cast me...”

- This verse names Yahweh as responsible for throwing Jonah into the sea.
- The sailors in 1:13 are human instruments that preformed the divine will of God.
- The calming of the sea shows that they were the agents of Yahweh will.
- Jonah isn’t blaming God for his predicament, but acknowledges the reality of the situation: Yahweh cast him into the depts, and only He can get Jonah out.

- Jonah's situation isn't due to the storm, the sea, or the sailors, but has come about because he evaded God's call.

“For you cast me into the deep...”

- Jonah's prayer unleashes a flood of water imagery.
- Connection to Psalms:
 - Psalm 69:1-2, “Save me, O God! For the waters have come up to my neck. I sink in deep mire, where there is no foothold; I have come into deep waters, and the flood sweeps over me.”
 - Psalm 88:6-7, “You have put me in the depths of the pit, in the regions dark and deep. Your wrath lies heavy upon me, and you overwhelm me with all your waves.”
- Connection to other OT Text:
 - Noah's Ark
 - The Song of Moses:
 - The horse and his rider he has thrown into the sea (Ex. 15:1).
 - Pharaoh's chariots and his host he cast into the sea, and his chosen officers were sunk in the Red Sea. The floods covered them; they went down into the depths like a stone... (Ex. 15:4-5)
- These passages tie together water and death.
 - Sometimes the language is purely metaphorical, as it was with the psalmists.
 - Other times it quite literally accurate, as it was for Jonah.
 - Throughout Scripture, water and death is tied to water destroying sin, death, and the devil to bring about new life.
 - Baptism:
 - What benefits does Baptism give? It works forgiveness of sins, rescues from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe this, as the words and promises of God declare.
 - What does such baptizing with water indicate? It indicates that the Old Adam in us should by daily contrition and repentance be drowned and die with all sins and evil desires, and that a new man should daily emerge and arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever.

Final Thoughts / Questions

- QUESTION: Is the great fish an instrument of death or life?

Closing Prayer

Almighty God, grant that we, who have been redeemed from the old life of sin by our Baptism into the death and resurrection of Your Son, Jesus Christ, may be renewed by Your Holy Spirit to live in righteousness and true holiness; through Jesus Christ our Lord.