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C0820 – May 28, 2008 – Jonah 1:17-2:10 – The Lord Saves Jonah

Alright, last time we dealt with a special issue, we broke from our normal verse by verse and dealt with the incredulity of Jonah being swallowed by the great fish. This is a historical fact which demands our faith just as much as the historical fact of the resurrection demands our faith. There's a one to one historical correspondence. And what we saw was that this event in Jonah's life was picked up by Jesus as a prophecy of His own death, burial and resurrection. As Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a sea monster so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. So we showed that this expression three days and three nights was an idiom among the Jews that stood for three days. So that the traditional Friday view is the only view that reconciles all the passages related to this. For the Jews any part of a day was as the whole of a day, so you have Jesus being placed in the tomb on Friday before 6pm, then he spends all day Saturday in the tomb, then he spends part of Sunday in the tomb and is raised that day, the first day of the week, that gets you two partial days and one full day, which is the equivalent of the expression three days and three nights. And that's the same amount of time Jonah spent in the great fish. Tonight we want to look at some poetry Jonah composed, mentally, while he was inside the fish, obviously he wrote this down later.

Let's keep in mind the significance of these events here in the practical arena. This is one of the most visual events portraying the spiritual decline of a believer who decides to go negative volition. That negative volition is described in vv 1-3 as Jonah fleeing the prophetic office. At that point he is out of fellowship and he starts to make systematic mistake after systematic mistake. One wrong choice led to a series of wrong choices because he refused to get back into fellowship. This is the believer who is determined to have things his way. He's not going to respond to God so he spirals downward into

spiritual depression. Jonah's going to be in real bad shape before long out on that ship. So bad that he anesthetizes himself from the guilt to the point that when God sent a great storm, a storm that would knock your socks off, Jonah's sleeping like a baby in the hold of the ship. Now this is a pagan coping strategy, an escapism, trying to avoid facing the spiritual problem. You never want to confuse the symptom for the problem. His problem is not the drugs or the alcohol, those are just a symptom of something deeper going on. He's using drugs to mask the deeper problem. That something deeper is spiritual rebellion against the authority of God and until he's willing to submit to the Lord and call on Him he's just going to spiral deeper and deeper and deeper into the depths of that sea, it's quite literally a picture of sinking spiritually toward physical death. That's the picture we see in chapter 2, a believer spiraling deeper and deeper into the depths of depravity because I'm not ready to respond to the Lord. So here's the sequence of chapter 1 and it's a very important sequence, it's a sequence that has been played out time and time again by believers, it's always the same sequence and you'd think we'd learn from Jonah what not to do here. See you don't have to learn by experience, you can learn from Jonah. That's why this is here so when you start down this path you remember Jonah sinking in that ship and you say, "Uh, uh, I don't want to follow the footsteps of Jonah, that's a depressing journey. So the sequence is Rebellion, we do some idiotic thing, rejecting the authority of God and supplanting Him and His will for our life with our own self-will, I'm going to do what I'm going to do and I'm going to do it my way, then the Lord Disciplines, the Lord disciplines those whom He loves, that's Chapter 1. Then tonight, the third thing is finally Jonah Responds with positive volition and fourth, the Lord Delivers, He's a Savior and He's ready and willing to save the believer who submits and calls upon Him.

So we want to go into the gracious salvation of the Lord starting in 1:17, if I were making the chapter breaks I would place it after 1:16, that's the way the Jews did it, our 1:17 is their 2:1. So verse 17 is a summary verse. It summarizes the time Jonah spent in the fish. 2:1-10 describes in detail what happened inside that fish until he was vomited out on dry land. So let's start with the summary in v 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.** The fish was sent providentially, that's the point of this verse, it was planned by God to serve as a prophetic type of the death, burial

and resurrection of Christ. So **Jonah was in the stomach of the fish three days and three nights** meaning one full day and part of two other days, **three days and three nights** is a Jewish idiom. This does not necessitate anything like 72 hours. The Jews reckoned part of a day as the whole day. So Jonah spent part of a day, a whole second day and part of a third day in the belly of a great **fish**. This corresponds to the time Jesus spent in the grave so the traditional Friday Crucifixion view is the best view with a Sunday Resurrection. But what I want you to see tonight with this verse is that it's a summary of 2:1-10 and now we want to go into the details of what happened inside that fish.

When he was swallowed, and notice he was not eaten, he was swallowed whole, but once he was inside, verse 1, **Then Jonah prayed to the Lord his God from the stomach of the fish,** so we're inside the fish now. Your Bible likely has some kind of title for this section, that's called a pericope. What are some of them? "Jonah's Prayer," "Jonah's Prayer of Deliverance." Typically it's something involving prayer. I want you to forget that for now. Those pericope headings are not inspired of course, editors added those, and in this case the idea of prayer is misleading. Technically this is a Hebrew poem. Experts on the Psalms call this "Jonah's Poem" or "Jonah's Psalm" The Hebrew structure is undoubtedly poetic. Translators have noticed this and depicted this by formatting this section a little different so it looks like your Psalms. That's because the translators recognize the poetic structure. Now there is a lot of confusion on this section because of pericope headings and while they are usually helpful for getting the context you can see that they are very influential in people's interpretations. People get the idea that "Well here I'm reading a prayer and Jonah's praying for God to save him from the fish." That's not what this is about, that IS **EMPHATICALLY NOT** what these verses are discussing. Jonah's already been saved. He was saved by the fish, He didn't need to be saved from the fish, God sent the fish to save Jonah from drowning. That's the first thing you have got to understand about this section. So chapter 2 is not Jonah's *prayer* for God to deliver him but it is Jonah's *praise* to God for delivering him. It's a Psalm of praise which he sings inside the stomach of that fish.ⁱ I point this out because you have got to be careful with periscope headings, they can get you on the wrong track.

Verse 2, here's the beginning of the poem, **and he said, "I called out of my distress to the Lord,"** so he's inside the fish and he's recounting the **distress** he faced when he was tossed overboard into the Mediterranean Sea. He went into an emergency situation and therefore he **called out...to the Lord**. This is the call for aid, I need some help here Lord, I'm not sufficient. The point is that finally, after all this running from the Lord Jonah came to the end of his rope and he gave up, he gave up on his autonomous rebellion and now that he's gone down, down, down he calls out to the Lord. **And He answered me**. See, the Lord is just waiting for the believer to go positive and once he goes positive the Lord responds immediately. There is no delay in the Lord's response to the believer who finally says, "Alright Lord, I need your help here." Now the rest of the verse is Hebrew parallelism, a common structure in Hebrew poetry where you say one thing and then you say it again with different words. In English poetry we like to rhyme, they don't do that in Hebrew, they use plays on words, they use contrasts and parallelisms, this is a parallelism and it's just another way of saying what the first part of the verse already stated. So, **I cried for help from the depth of Sheol, You heard my voice** is another way of saying **I called out of my distress to the Lord, And He answered me**. They parallel one another, they mean the same thing. Now some students on the university campus have been mocked for this verse. The professors get a big laugh out of Jonah, at the expense of the students tuition because "No one" they say, "could survive in the stomach of a fish, you've got an acidic environment, digestive enzymes, it's just pure fantasy."ⁱⁱ In response to this some expositors said, "Okay, you're right, Jonah didn't survive inside the fish," but he actually died and was resurrected so we have a one-to-one correspondence with Jesus' death and resurrection. This is an example of how not to do apologetics. You don't respond by creating another interpretation that's not plain in the text. That was one of the hallmarks of the early apologists, the enemies of Christianity would bring up these texts and laugh at the Christians and to defend themselves the Christians would allegorize the text and say, "Oh, that's not really what it's saying, it's just an allegory" and that's what Origen did, that's what Augustine did. They were trying to accommodate the Bible to unbelief so it would be palatable to them. Don't do that, it causes more harm than good. But our point is that good men have done this and you may be tempted to do this when you don't have an answer, don't do it, good men have come to this passage, W. Graham Scroggie and J. Vernon McGee for example, and have argued that Jonah actually died and was resurrected deliberately

because of the scoffs of unbelievers. To support this view they lean heavily on this word **Sheol** since Sheol is the place of the dead, sometimes used of the grave; therefore Jonah died and went to Sheol. Now this creates several problems. For one it's in Hebrew parallelism, the expression **depth of Sheol** is in parallelism with **my distress**. He was in a state of distress, he was drowning, not dead. Second, he could not be resurrected since Paul says Jesus is the first to be resurrected (1 Cor 15:20, 23). You may be able to argue for a resuscitation but you're never going to be able to prove a resurrection. Third, David says his soul was brought up from Sheol but he didn't die (Ps 30:3). In other words we know this word **Sheol** can be used in the sense of drawing near to death. David drew near to death and Jonah drew near to death. So what we have here is the fact that Jonah is out in the Mediterranean he's sinking and he says, "Alright Lord, I've had enough, I'm tired of running from You, will You help me?" Jonah went a long way from God before he called out. He literally had to come to the brink of death before he said, "Alright Lord, I've had enough." Fourth, the argument that if Jonah died this would make it an exact parallel with Jesus is just not true. Jesus didn't drown He died on a cross. Jesus wasn't buried in a fish but in a tomb. So there are many differences either way you look at it. Lastly, sometimes they argue that people have been swallowed by fish before and survived, therefore that lessens the miraculous nature of this story, a genuine death and resurrection is better. Well, I have a whole collection of these stories in the endnotes of this lesson which you're welcome too but there are always questions as to the reliability of these stories and even if they are true it doesn't matter, what matters is not what do I want the Bible to say but what does the Bible say. And the Bible never states that Jonah actually died, it states that he was on the brink of death but the Lord saved him.

Verse 3, "**For You had cast me into the deep**, now look at this, I thought the sailors cast Jonah into the deep, but Jonah says the Lord cast him into the deep. In other words Jonah recognized the sovereign discipline of the Lord and that the Lord's discipline is often carried out by responsible agents, Jonah knew very well he was under divine discipline. **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.**" Now God is sovereign over the deep (*tehom*) (Gen 1:2). He's the God of the waters at creation, the God of the waters at the Flood, the God of the waters at the Red Sea, the God of the waters at the Jordan, the God of the waters of Jonah, God

of the water turned to wine, that's the point, He controls the waters. Some of this is very similar to certain Psalms like 18:4-6. **4“So I said, ‘I have been expelled from Your sight** obviously he's sinking in the waters, he thought his life was over, he thought he was going to drown. **Nevertheless I will look again toward Your holy temple.**' A remarkable statement, in the midst of drowning the man remembers the doctrine of resurrection. I may drown but I will be resurrected and when I am **I will look toward** the Lord's **holy temple**. So this is a verse on the resurrection, never cited by scholars but clear once you straighten out these other issues. Jonah believed in resurrection, Daniel believed in resurrection (Dan 12:2), Job believed in resurrection. Turn to Job 19:25-27, Job lived way back before Abraham and resurrection was a doctrine known as far back as that time. This is not new with the NT, this is not new with Jesus, this was well-known, the Sadducees rejected it but Jesus proved from the Torah that the OT taught resurrection. And here's Job, this is the earliest direct statement we have on resurrection in Scripture. I take it that Job lived during the period of Gen 9-11, so he was before Abraham though he may have lived long enough to know Abraham. and he says in v 25, “As for me, I know that my Redeemer lives, And at the last He will take His stand on the earth. ²⁶“Even after my skin is destroyed,” after you die your skin decays so this is after physical death, “Yet” what does Job say? ““from my flesh I shall see God;” he believed in the physical resurrection, a resurrection body of human flesh. “Whom I myself shall behold, And whom my eyes will see and not another.” He looks to the resurrection when he will look upon the Redeemer. All the great saints of Scripture looked to the physical resurrection. Lets' go back to Jonah, he's drowning and all these thoughts are flashing through his mind in those final moments as he sinks deeper and deeper, this is a dramatic moment he's recounting. Verse 5, **Water encompassed me to the point of death. The great deep engulfed me,** he's completely submerged, on the brink of death. **Weeds were wrapped around my head.** Now, I looked into this quite extensively to try to get an idea of how deep Jonah got before he was saved. Obviously here he's near the bottom of the sea. Seaweed requires some kind of hard substrate to grow on and it also requires light, it's a plant, has to do photosynthesis, so since you're light doesn't penetrate much deeper than ~100m, that's about the maximum depth. Of course you have the issue of how deep can a person go underwater without equipment, they call that free diving, without help you can't go more than ~90m and of course, you've got the limitation on how long a person can hold their breath, I don't think Jonah

was an Olympic free diver, so unless you invoke some kind of miraculous explanation, and there's no indication of that till the fish, everything is pointing toward he's drowning, so I suggest that Jonah's no more than ~20m deep when he gets wrapped up in the seaweed, that's 60 feet, that's a lot of pressure, I can't go more than about 18 feet before my ears start hurting, your ATM pressure increases exponentially as you go deeper underwater so I'm thinking he's still on the continental shelf somewhere in the Mediterranean, not far from Joppa. I don't think they're far out for that reason, plus the fact that the sailors would never have tried to row back to shore in that kind of storm if they were far out. So we're dealing with a continental shelf location, probably no more than 20m deep. Verse 6, **I descended to the roots of the mountains.** That's an expression referring to the bottom of the sea where the mountains are rooted, **The earth with its bars was around me forever,** okay, he's trapped, imprisoned in the earth at the bottom of the sea. There's no escape **But You have brought up my life from the pit, O Lord my God.** Okay, this is the rescue. The Lord rescues him from drowning. Verse 7, **"While I was fainting away,"** He was passing out from lack of oxygen, he was about to die, if you've ever passed out (and I have, don't show me blood unless you want to see a guy pass out), but if you've passed out you know what this is like, you get real dizzy and then boom, lights out, this is as close as you can get to death, that's when the fish swallowed Jonah whole. His first thoughts as he was rescued were **I remembered the Lord,** his training came back to him, his years of doctrinal study stored away in his memory bank, that's foremost on his mind. **And my prayer came to You, Into Your holy temple.** Apparently when his prayer reached the Lord it was answered immediately, of course the Lord knew all along Jonah would return to his senses and thus He had prepared the fish for that time and place when Jonah would call upon Him to be saved. So, I imagine all this takes probably no more than 2 minutes from the moment he goes underwater to the moment he's rescued. So all this from v 2-7 was going through his mind out there in the water. And you'll notice his **prayer** here in v 7, not what we have recorded here in these words, okay, we don't have the words of his actual prayer while he was drowning, what we have here is his poetic praise from inside the fish. So he tells us in his poem that he did pray, *tevilla*, a different word from v 1, this is what he was praying while he was drowning, he was praying for God to deliver him. Verse 8, **"Those who regard vain idols Forsake their faithfulness,"** now that's pretty startling that he would say that, that he would admit this, do you realize what Jonah's

saying here, he's saying that way back in Gath-hepher when he fled the Lord he became an idolater. Any time the believer violates the will of God for his life he's regarding vain idols. What was Jonah's idol? If he turned from worshipping God what did he turn too? Where had his allegiance been transferred? Transferred from YHWH to himself and his own self-will. "I want to do what I want to do. God had given Him everything and now Jonah uses his God-given legs to run to Tarshish, his God-given cash to buy a ticket, God's physics of buoyancy to survive on a ship made from God's trees. Now that's an idolater, someone who uses all the things of God as if they're his own possessions to rebel against Him. And Jonah realizes that when he took that first step east instead of west he became an idolater. Every time we sin we become temporary idolaters, *if* we get back in fellowship.

Now, verse 9, **But I will sacrifice to You With the voice of thanksgiving.** He's going to make a trip to the Temple in Jerusalem and he's going to **sacrifice** and make good on certain **vows**. That's the game plan when he gets back to shore. **Salvation is from the Lord.**" That's the theme of this poem, the source of salvation. Jonah didn't do a thing to save Himself, he was drowning and he called on the Lord and the Lord answered. Now this is a physical deliverance, God saving a believer. Eternal deliverance is conditioned on faith alone, physical deliverance is conditioned on calling. I want you to see this over in Rom 10:9-10, 13-17). Vv 9-10 are often used evangelistically but that's a misconception. What we have is a statement in v 9, and an explanation in v 10, believe unto righteousness or technically justification. When a person believes with the heart they are justified. With the mouth a person confesses unto salvation, contextually Rom 9-11 are talking about Israel and this is in the last days of the Tribulation. So when Israel confesses or "calls on the Lord", the equivalent begins in v 13 where he quotes Joel 2, but at that point then they will be saved physically from the Antichrist and his armies. To prove this look at v 14. How will the call on him in whom they have not believed? So obviously they have to believe before they can call on him to be saved. Well, our point here is that Jonah is a believer who is calling on the Lord to be saved just as the future Israelite believers will call on the Lord to be saved.

But whether it's eternal salvation or temporal salvation it doesn't matter, **Salvation is from the Lord. Salvation**, in the Hebrew *yeshua*, the Hebrew name of Jesus, the equivalent of Joshua, the sole source of salvation is

YHWH. That's why when we were in the Book of Acts a few weeks ago and you're reading Peter's defense and he closes with those wonderful words, "And there is salvation in no other name, for there is no other name under heaven by which men must be saved." And I said that goes back to the OT and Peter is arguing that Jesus' is YHWH. If Jesus is not YHWH then you have salvation in two names and Peter would have been executed but he identified Jesus with YHWH, arguing that Jesus was the Messiah of God who is salvation.

Verse 10, **Then the Lord commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah up onto the dry land.** So finally he's out of the fish. We aren't told where this happened. Josephus says the fish moved into the Euxine Sea, that's what we know as the Black Sea today, if that's the case then he was spit out somewhere up here and went from there to Nineveh. Other commentators just say he was vomited up on the shores of the land of Israel. I don't know, there's not enough information to determine that, but it did happen. You want to notice that the Lord commanded the fish, obviously because He is the Lord of nature. You want to notice God's control over nature throughout the book of Jonah. In 1:4 what does He control? The wind, He sends it upon the sea. In 1:17 what does he control? He appoints the fish to swallow Jonah. In 2:10 what does He control, once more the fish, commanding it to vomit out Jonah. Incidentally some people say that when a fish dies it vomits, so maybe the fish died. 4:6, turn over to chapter 4, what aspect of nature does He control in this verse? Plants, a plant grows over Jonah, verse 7? A worm, there's your parasite, He controls that, and v 8, He appoints a scorching east wind. Wind again. God controls nature. You want a real visual of this go watch the movie Prince Caspian. If you want to get an idea of the control of God over nature. Every thing in nature is at His disposal and that movie portrays the wonder of our God. When He speaks nature responds.

Okay, let's just trace the whole thing as a wrap up. We want to put everything together before I'm gone for three weeks. The Command comes to Jonah, probably here in Gath-hepher, he Rebels, comes down to Joppa, pays the fair, gets on the ship, takes his anesthetic and goes down below to sleep, he's declining into more rebellion, trying to cope with his guilt with a pagan coping strategy, they're out here in the water and the Lord Disciplines with a great storm, the storm increases more and more, that's an increase in the Lord's Discipline, the longer Jonah remains in Rebellion the greater the

Discipline, he's tossed overboard, that's an increase in Discipline, he's headed toward the Sin Unto Death, still not responding to God, then he Responds to the Lord's Discipline, calling on Him for deliverance and the Lord graciously Delivers Him from death by means of the great fish. Now he's in the fish and he composes this poem, praising God for saving him.

Let's close out by seeing this same sequence in James. James is not an epistle written to test whether you're really a believer or not. It's an epistle written to those who are already eternally saved, their problem is they have doctrine but they aren't applying doctrine, therefore they're spiraling down to physical death. Same case as Jonah. He's a believer who's got doctrine but he's refusing to apply doctrine, therefore he's spiraling down to death. Alright, v 14, there's a four-fold progression here so watch it. "But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust." (1) We are tempted. Jonah was tempted. He was tempted to have the good, easy life, no more prophet. "Then when lust has conceived," okay (2) that is when he decided to sin, when he decided, I'm not going to Nineveh, I'm going to Tarshish, then (3) "it gives birth to sin;" that is he went the other way, he went to Joppa and got on the ship to Tarshish, (4) "and when sin is accomplished," or better "full grown", that is, he kept on sinning, he remained in a sin pattern then the result is "it brings forth death," that's premature physical death. Alright, Jonah got out of this cycle just before he died physically. But it's better late than never. That's the story of Jonah, that's the story of a believer who goes negative volition, they will spiral down, spiral down, down, down, down and if they just keep fleeing and don't call out to God, they'll eventually die prematurely. But if they will interrupt this process somewhere along the line then God will save them. That's why Jonah wrote the poem, God graciously delivers.

¹ There are at least two known monsters of the deep who could easily have swallowed Jonah. They are the Balaenoptera Musculus or sulphur-bottom whale, and the Rhinodon Typicus or whale shark. Neither of these monsters of the deep have any teeth. They feed in an interesting way by opening their enormous mouths, submerging their lower jaw, and rushing through the water at terrific speed. After straining out the water, they swallow whatever is left. A sulphur-bottom whale, one hundred feet long, was captured off Cape Cod in 1933. His mouth was ten or twelve feet wide—so big he could easily have swallowed a horse. These whales have four to six compartments in their stomachs, in any one of which a colony of men could find free lodging. They might even have a choice of rooms, for in the head of this whale is a wonderful air storage chamber, an enlargement of the nasal

sinus, often measuring seven feet high, seven feet wide, by fourteen feet long. If he has an unwelcome guest on board who gives him a headache, the whale swims to the nearest land and gets rid of the offender as he did Jonah.

The *Cleveland Plain Dealer* recently quoted an article by Dr. Ransome Harvey who said that a dog was lost overboard from a ship. It was found in the head of a whale six days later, alive and barking.

Frank Bullen, F.R.G.S., who wrote, "The Cruise of the Cathalot," tells of a shark fifteen feet in length which was found in the stomach of a whale. He says that when dying the whale ejects the contents of its stomach.

The late Dr. Dixon stated that in a museum at Beirut, Lebanon, there is a head of a whale shark big enough to swallow the largest man that history records! He also tells of a white shark of the Mediterranean which swallowed a whole horse; another swallowed a reindeer minus only its horns. In still another Mediterranean white shark was found a whole sea cow, about the size of an ox.

These facts show that Jonah could have been swallowed by either a whale or a shark. But has any other man besides Jonah been swallowed and lived to tell the tale? We know of two such instances.

The famous French scientist, M. de Parville, writes of James Bartley, who in the region of the Falkland Islands near South America, was supposed to have been drowned at sea. Two days after his disappearance, the sailors made a catch of a whale. When it was cut up, much to their surprise they found their missing friend alive but unconscious inside the whale. He revived and has been enjoying the best of health ever since his adventure.

Dr. Harry Rimmer, President of the Research Science Bureau of Los Angeles, writes of another case. "In the *Literary Digest* we noticed an account of an English sailor who was swallowed by a gigantic Rhinodon in the English Channel. Briefly, the account stated that in the attempt to harpoon one of these monstrous sharks, this sailor fell overboard, and before he could be picked up again, the shark turned and engulfed him. Forty-eight hours after the accident occurred, the fish was sighted and slain. When the shark was opened by the sailors, they were amazed to find the man unconscious but alive! He was rushed to the hospital where he was found to be suffering from shock alone, and a few hours later was discharged as being physically fit. The account concluded by saying that the man was on exhibit in a London Museum at a shilling admittance fee; being advertised as 'The Jonah of the Twentieth Century.' "

In 1926 Dr. Rimmer met this man, and writes that his physical appearance was odd; his body was devoid of hair and patches of yellowish-brown color covered his entire skin.

If two men could exist for two days and nights inside of marine monsters, could not a prophet of God, under His direct care and protection, stand the experience a day and a night longer—so why should we doubt God's Word? – J. Vernon McGee, *Thru the Bible*, on Jonah 2:2. See also some question about these stories at

<http://www.answersingenesis.org/creation/v17/i2/jonah.asp>

ⁱⁱ Some commentators have suggested that when Jonah entered Nineveh his body was scarred from these digestive enzymes in the fish and that though he survived he was scarred for life from this incident and these white scars are what served as a sign that Jonah truly had been in the belly of a great fish.

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