

Please turn with me in your Bibles to Jonah chapter 1. When we last left off in this chapter Jonah had been thrown overboard into the sea. This brought an end to the horrific experience that these sailors just went through with the mighty tempest of the Lord raging about them. Their response to this deliverance from the storm was to worship Jehovah and make vows unto Him. And as I said last week, when these sailors tossed Jonah overboard they had no idea what would happen to him. From their vantage point this was the death of Jonah the prophet. But as we will see this week, this wasn't the case. God was not finished with His prophet. Let us now turn our attention to the reading of God's Word from Jonah chapter 1 and we will be considering verse 17.

Read Jonah 1:17

Pray

This part of the story is probably the most famous of all of the book of Jonah. Our kids know the story of Jonah and the great fish. It's in all of the children's story Bibles. There is a Veggie-Tales movie and book recounting this great story. I would even wager that if you were to walk up to any random person on the street and ask them if they had heard of this story, the vast majority would say they have. While having a strong familiarity with a Biblical account is never a bad thing, there is a danger that comes with it. Far too often we can convince ourselves that we know the story, we've known it from our childhood, and so we don't have to pay attention when it is preached on from the pulpit. There's also a danger in being so familiar with a story, especially one such as this one, that we begin to lose our faith in the fact that it actually occurred. The story of Jonah almost becomes something of a Christian folklore tale in which we learn a moral lesson, but we never gain a true appreciation and gratitude for what the Lord actually does and why that is important for us today. We stick it on the shelf right next to the Berenstain Bears and the rest of our Veggie-Tales books as just another story to read to the kids before they go to bed. But friends, there is so much more to this story than just something interesting to

read every now and then. We have already seen the complexity of this man of God, his allowing sin to reign over him, the sovereignty of the Lord over the seas, and the great acts of repentance seen both in Jonah as well as the mariners. This is not just a neat tale; this is an actual account of God's sovereignty, justice, mercy, and salvation. This is precisely what we see here in our text this morning. Though it is but one short verse, so much theological truth is packed into these few words. So we will consider these truths as we take up the theme of Jonah's salvation. We will do so by looking at first, the means of Jonah's salvation; next, the act of Jonah's salvation; and finally, the sign in Jonah's salvation.

Let us first consider the means of Jonah's salvation. "Now the Lord had prepared a great fish..." Here we see once again the sovereignty of the Lord put on display in this story. Jonah has been cast into the sea. The waters have surrounded him and all that awaits him is this watery grave. As he plunges deeper and deeper into the depths of the sea, the Lord had already arranged a provision for Jonah so that what seemed to be utter death would actually be his salvation. The Lord had prepared a great fish. Matthew Henry comments, "This fish was prepared, lay ready under water close by the ship, that he might keep Jonah from sinking to the bottom, and save him alive, though he deserved to die." There has been a lot of speculation about this fish. Some take the word prepared to mean that God specially created a fish as the means of salvation, but that is not what the word means. Never is this Hebrew word used to speak of something being created or formed or fashioned. Instead, it is used to mean exactly what it is translated as here. The Lord had prepared a great fish. The fish was appointed for a particular task, not created for one. There was no need for a special act of creation here, because Jehovah is the Lord of all creation, and He can cause even this great fish to serve His purpose. Just as He used Balaam's ass to rebuke that man, going against everything that we understand about natural creatures, so too does He use this great fish to provide salvation unto Jonah from the waters that had encompassed him. What a great display of the

sovereignty of God we have here. What seemed to be the end of this great prophet, the Lord used as a means to further His plans.

But what exactly was this great fish? I'm sure every one of you knows this story as Jonah and the whale, but is this great fish a whale? In Matthew chapter 12, which we will look at later, Christ calls it a whale, at least He does in our English translation. That is because the Greek word for fish used there later became associated primarily with the whale. So it could have been a whale, but the text does not say specifically. But there is no whale on this earth which ordinarily could do what this great fish does. The blue whale is the largest sea mammal that we know of, and it cannot be pointed to as a definitive answer for what the great fish was. In fact, scientifically, it could not have been any whale that we know of. Then what about some sort of sea monster? The Scripture speaks of the leviathan, the serpent of the sea; could that be what the Lord prepared here? Perhaps, though if that were the case why is it only described as a great fish and not said to be a leviathan? The fact is that the Scriptures do not tell us exactly what type of fish this is, and that is because it does not matter. The point is that the Lord had prepared this great fish, that He is the absolute sovereign over all things, and that He uses whatsoever He wills to bring about His holy purpose. Jonah's life is saved by a miracle, and he is able to continue on living so that he can fulfill the task that the sovereign Lord has called him to. In the midst of judgment God remembers mercy. That is what we must remember here. When you forget this important truth then you run the risk of focusing on trivial things, such as what kind of fish this was, and you will give yourself over to vain speculation.

The problem is that we want to be able to give some natural explanation for the fish that the Lord prepared in order to refute the objections of nonbelievers. But this is a trap, dear friends, that is incredibly dangerous if you fall for it. The reason this is dangerous is because there is no natural explanation. There is no scientific means to explain what this great fish is. No matter how much you appeal the man who a few years ago was swallowed by a humpback whale,

it will not satisfy the objections of nonbelievers. That man was only inside the whale for 30-40 seconds, not three days and three nights as Jonah was. Friends, you cannot fall into the trap of needing to explain things in the Bible from a scientific perspective. Jonah was saved by a miracle. This great fish was prepared by the sovereign hand of God and He caused it to do something that naturally is impossible. We live in a world today that scoffs at the miraculous, but if you take God at His word, then you must recognize the truthfulness of what the Scriptures say, even if it cannot be scientifically explained. And remember, even if you could adequately give a natural explanation for the great fish, that will never satisfy the unregenerate man. Explaining away the Scripture does nothing but discredit you and the Scripture. The only way they will believe is by faith. So instead of trying to show the unbeliever how it is scientifically possible, show him what this text is actually highlighting: that even though we deserve death and destruction, Jehovah provided our salvation. Unless they come to embrace the miracle of redemption, they will never believe the miracle of Jonah's salvation. This verse is not written for us to just gloss over and say oh that makes perfect sense. This verse is written to show the supernatural miraculous sovereign mercy of Jehovah. Point men to Christ not to flimsy evidence.

So the means of Jonah's salvation was in the Lord preparing a great fish. Let us now consider the act of Jonah's salvation. "Now the Lord had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah." The act of Jonah's salvation is in the Lord causing this great fish which He had prepared to swallow up Jonah. Surely you can somewhat imagine what Jonah had just experienced. He was publicly chastened by the Lord for his unfaithfulness and nearly was the cause of a ship full of men to be utterly destroy by a great tempest. He was confronted with his sin and publicly repented of those sins, telling the people on board that the only way to stay the righteous hand of God's wrath was to throw him overboard. Now Jonah is plunged into the sea. The waters encompass him and there seems to be no escape from the judgement that is at hand. Surely he was experiencing the words of

Psalm 69:2, “ I sink in deep mire, where there is no standing: I am come into deep waters, where the floods overflow me.” Or even Psalm 42:7, “Deep calleth unto deep at the noise of thy waterspouts: all thy waves and thy billows are gone over me.” Calvin writes, “As Jonah then had faithfully endeavored to serve God, and to devote himself to him through the whole of his past life, now that he is cast into the sea as one unworthy of the common light, that he is cut off from the society of men, and that he seems unworthy of undergoing a common or an ordinary punishment, but is exiled, as it were, from the world, so as to be deprived of light and air.” The waters of judgement have gripped this prophet and are dragging him deeper and deeper into that dark watery grave. He knew this was the death that awaited him. He knew that he deserved this punishment for his crimes against his God. He knew this was the end. But, oh, how limited is the knowledge of man. “Now the Lord had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah.” This is the miraculous salvation of the Lord. Just as you think you have sunk into the miry depths, just as you think that the floods have overwhelmed you, just as you think the billows and the waves are gone over you, just as you think your destruction is imminent, Jehovah displays His mighty sovereignty in bringing about your salvation. One second the waters threaten to choke the life out of you, and the next you are safely within the caverns of the Lord’s provision. There was nothing Jonah could have done to rescue himself from the deep. Just as the rowing of the sailors was useless against the tempest on the sea, so too would any attempts by Jonah to swim have been useless against the pull of the waters deep. But the Lord provided.

“Now the Lord had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah.” It’s important to note that the great fish swallowed him up; it didn’t chew upon him, but took him down whole. This shows the Lord’s providential care for His child, that the fish He had prepared would not be Jonah’s demise, but his salvation. Henry writes, “It was of the Lord’s mercies that Jonah was not now consumed. The fish swallowed up Jonah, not to devour him, but to protect him.” What in a normal or natural scenario would have

been terrifying tragic means of ending life, the Lord uses as a miraculous act of preserving life. Jonah is brought into safety, refuge, pulled up from the waters deep by the mouth of this great fish. "Then the channels of waters were seen, and the foundations of the world were discovered at thy rebuke, O Lord, at the blast of the breath of thy nostrils. He sent from above, he took me, he drew me out of many waters... He brought me forth also into a large place; he delivered me, because he delighted in me." (Psalm 18:15-16, 19) And what is also important with this fact is that it furthers Jonah as a type of Christ. His body was not corrupted in this act of salvation, but instead was preserved whole. Jonah experienced but a taste of what is spoken of in Psalm 16:9-11, "Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoiceth: my flesh also shall rest in hope. For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore." Yet, it was Christ who experienced this fully. It is Christ whom this Psalm is about. And so when you look upon the act of Jonah's salvation it ought to ultimately point you to Christ and His work in purchasing your salvation.

Friends, this is what Christ has done for you. You were thrown into the watery depths with no hope of survival. You were encompassed round about by the billows and waves of your sin which ensnared you. You were hopeless and sinking to the bottom of the sea destined for destruction, but the Lord in His sovereignty came in and saved you from the grave. "But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus." Oh what a glorious salvation we have in Christ. What a marvelous act of salvation that has been purchased with the blood of the Son. If you are in Christ you have much to rejoice over. You who were once dead have been made alive. You

who were once in the belly of hell, gripped by the ensnaring trap of sin and misery, have been brought to safety in the arms of your beloved. Rejoice in the Lord for the great work He has done. Praise Jehovah for His wondrous act of salvation.

So Jonah has been saved from the depths of the sea, and that salvation is for a purpose. It has a cause. It is a sign that points to something greater. Let now focus our attention on the sign in Jonah's salvation. "Now the Lord had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights." Jonah was in the belly of the fish, in safe custody, three days and three nights, that he might rightly typify Christ's burial in the grave. Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights just as Christ was in the belly of the earth. And both were in order that their rising again they would bring forth the doctrine of repentance to the Gentile world. We know this is the sign of Jonah for the Lord Jesus Christ Himself tells us such in Matthew 12, "Then certain of the scribes and of the Pharisees answered, saying, Master, we would see a sign from thee. But he answered and said unto them, An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas: For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here." The certain scribes and Pharisees wanted a sign from Christ, something to prove what He was saying was true. But they had already seen these miraculous signs in Christ's ministry. And yet they still did not believe. But Christ says He will give them a sign, but it will not be what they were asking for. Henry says, "They shall have one sign of a different kind from all these, and that is, the resurrection of Christ from the dead by his own power, called here the sign of the prophet Jonas this was yet reserved for their conviction, and was intended to be the great proof of Christ's being

the Messiah; for by that he was declared to be the Son of God with power, Rom. 1:4.”

But you may be thinking how can this sign of Jonah be a sign which points to Christ’s resurrection. How can Christ say, “For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale’s belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth”? Was Christ not crucified and buried on the sixth day and rose again on the first; that’s not three days and three nights. I’ve heard this argument brought up by those seeking to discredit the Bible, citing it as an error of the Scriptures. I have seen atheists use this very point to try to argue that the whole thing is made up. So what do we do with this? You need to understand that three days and three nights is utilizing a Hebrew literary device. What is being said here is not literally three days and three nights, or 72 hours, but instead that Jonah was in the belly of the fish for a period of time over the span of three days, just as Christ was in the heart of the earth for a period of time over three days. This is a common way of speaking among the Hebrew people. We see this plainly in the story of Esther in chapter 4 verse 16, “Go, gather together all the Jews that are present in Shushan, and fast ye for me, and neither eat nor drink three days, night or day: I also and my maidens will fast likewise; and so will I go in unto the king, which is not according to the law: and if I perish, I perish.” The call is for the people to fast, neither eat nor drink three days, night or day. And yet in 5:1 we read, “Now it came to pass on the third day, that Esther put on her royal apparel, and stood in the inner court of the king’s house, over against the king’s house: and the king sat upon his royal throne in the royal house, over against the gate of the house.” There was no third night, since Esther went before the king on the third day, so how can this be so? It is because to the Hebrew people part of the day constitutes the whole of the day. So when we read that Jonah was in the belly of the fish for three days and three nights, or when Christ says that He will be in the heart of the earth for three days and three nights, we must read it with an understanding of this way of speaking.

It is also important to realize that this sign of Jonah was not simply for the Ninevites, nor simply for the unbelieving Jews in the first century, but it is for you as well. We live in a society that requires a sign in order to believe. So many times I have heard unbelievers say that if they were shown proof then they would believe. But this is just evidence of the evil and adulterous generation that we live in that seeks after a sign. Jonah's metaphorical death, burial, and resurrection here in this story is a sign unto the people of Nineveh of the redemptive work of God in saving undeserving sinners. Christ's literal death, burial, and resurrection was a sign unto the unbelieving Jews that they had turned their backs on Jehovah and crucified the Lord of glory. And it stands as a sign unto all of us today that Christ Jesus is the greater than Jonah come to proclaim the salvation of the Lord unto the whole earth. But there is another aspect of this sign that is for today as well. "The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here." The Ninevites, as we will see later on in this book, repented of their sins and turned to the living and true God just like the sailors did. They heard the cry of the prophet and repented. Yet in this evil and adulterous generation the cries of God's prophets are scoffed at and mocked. The men of Nineveh will rise up in judgement against this present generation just as the Lord promised they would against His own for not heeding the word spoken unto them. Will you be numbered among those who are judged by the men of Nineveh? Will you stand alongside the unbelieving Jews and receive the same just reward? You have been given the Word of God, the Gospel has been proclaimed unto you, you have the greater than Jonah set before you; will you reject Him or will you be as the men of Nineveh and turn from your sins and turn unto Christ?

Brothers and sisters, this salvation which Jonah experienced is laid out before you this day. Lay hold of it. Cling to it. Embrace it.

Rest in the sovereignty of God who will be the one who provides for you in your darkest hour. He has provided the means of salvation. Christ Jesus has performed the act of salvation. You have been given the sign of Jonah in his salvation. Do not let it be a testimony of judgement unto you in that last great day. Cry out to the Lord. Cling to Him. He alone is your salvation.