

Jonah—A Sign Pointing to Christ

Jonah 1:17; Colossians 2:12

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If skeptics have a problem with Jonah being buried **ALIVE** in the tomb of that great fish or whale and coming forth 3 days later, imagine how great must be their ridicule and scorn of the true account of Jesus Christ being buried **DEAD** in the belly of the earth for 3 days, and then brought forth **ALIVE** with the same body, albeit raised with resurrection glory. The skeptic will not allow a miracle like that of Jonah or of Christ into his/her worldview, for to do so would bring him/her face to face with the sovereign, almighty God who created all things, who sustains and controls all things, and who has revealed in Scripture mankind to be lost in sin, deserving of eternal condemnation in hell, and in desperate need of the only Savior of mankind, Jesus Christ.

The relationship between Jonah and Christ is brought to the forefront by the Lord Jesus Christ Himself in Matthew 12:40: "For as Jonah 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." In fact, the historicity of the miraculous account of Jonah being buried **ALIVE** in the belly of the great fish or whale for three days is confirmed by the very words of Christ which were just read. For in demonstration of the historical nature of the Book of Jonah (and in particular, Jonah's three-day stay in the belly of the whale) the Lord Jesus Christ Himself cites this very event from the Book of Jonah as a historical parallel from the past that confirms that He would only remain for that same period of time (three days) within the grave before He was raised bodily from the dead. If Jonah's three-day stay in the belly of the whale was a mere fable, Christ would be basing His three days in the heart of the earth upon an event that was pure fiction. That would hardly be a sound reason to appeal to Jonah to corroborate His own historical resurrection after three days in the tomb. The very trustworthiness of Christ Himself is put forward as corroborating testimony that all of the events in the Book of Jonah are historical narratives inspired by the Holy Spirit.

This Lord's Day, I would like to explore more closely that relationship between Jonah and Christ in the first part of the sermon, and then in the second part of the sermon, I would like to explore the relationship of baptism to the burial of Christ. Thus, the two main points in the sermon this Lord's Day are the following: (1) Jonah's Burial—A Sign of Christ's Burial (Jonah 1:17; Matthew 12:40); (2) Water Baptism—A Sign of our Burial with Christ (Colossians 2:12).

I. Jonah's Burial—A Sign of Christ's Burial (Jonah 1:17; Matthew 12:40).

A. We had previously observed how the Lord prepared a hurricane-like storm to pursue His rebellious prophet, Jonah. By means of the ferocity of the storm, our Sovereign God was at work both in Jonah's life (who confessed his sin of fleeing from the revealed will of God in Jonah 1:10,12) and was at work in the lives of the Gentile sailors (who initially out of great fear began calling upon their false gods to deliver them in Jonah 1:5, but by the end of chapter one are calling upon Jehovah God, are fearing Jehovah exceedingly, and are offering both sacrifices and vows to the one true living God of the whole earth, as we see in Jonah 1:16). As impending death pursues these Gentile sailors in the form of this violent storm at sea, Jonah tells them that he must be cast overboard if they are to be saved (Jonah 1:10). Here we see a glimmer of Jonah as a picture of Christ to come. Of course, Christ did not die for His own sins, but willingly suffered for the sins of others. And though Jonah was suffering for his own sin, nevertheless, he was willing to suffer (by voluntarily being cast overboard) in order that these sailors might be saved from impending death. But the relationship between Jonah as a type (or picture) of Christ even becomes more clear (as we shall see) in the final verse

(verse 17) of chapter one, where we read, “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.”

B. This was no accidental or unplanned swallowing of Jonah as if this caught the Lord by surprise. No, to the contrary, our inspired text reveals that the Lord “had prepared” or appointed by way of His sovereign power a “great fish” to swallow Jonah. Just as the Lord sovereignly “sent out a great storm” (according to Jonah 1:4) to pursue one rebellious prophet, Jonah, so the Lord exerts His mighty power in appointing “a great fish” to appear just at the right time and in the right place to swallow a repentant Jonah (who now offers his life for idolatrous Gentiles). Granted these events are extraordinary, but dear ones, the Lord so loves and cares for you His children that He will spare nothing that He deems necessary to restore you unto Himself. If God did not spare His Only Begotten Son to redeem you from the guilt and penalty of sin, He will certainly not spare any storm or great fish in restoring you to Himself and in teaching you to flee sin rather than to flee His revealed will. Oh, the great and unsurpassing love of Christ for His beloved children. The more His chastening hurts the child of God, the more He reveals the depth of His love for that child, whom He will never let go.

C. Skeptics have cast forth their vomitus criticism once again upon the credibility of Holy Scripture by leaning upon their own understanding when they have asserted that a man could not possibly survive the lack of oxygen or the strong digestive juices within a fish or within a whale large enough to swallow a man. But again when man leans upon his own worldly wisdom and tells God what He (the Lord) can and cannot do, unbelieving man only reveals his own foolishness (regardless of the degrees he has behind his name). For the God who created all sea creatures on the fifth day by the word of His power can certainly appoint a great fish or a whale to swallow Jonah and can certainly preserve Jonah’s life in the belly of that great sea creature for three day (or longer) if He chooses to do so (Matthew 22:29, “Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures, nor the power of God.”).

1. Dear ones, if God could preserve Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego from not only the scorching heat of Nebuchadnezzar’s fire on their body and clothing, but even from the smell of smoke on their body of clothing, He can certainly preserve Jonah from digestive juices within the belly of a great fish or whale.

2. As Christians, we do not need for someone to find Noah’s ark on Mt. Ararat in order to know with absolute certainty that God brought a universal flood upon the earth. As Christians, we do not need for a shroud to be authenticated in order to know with absolute certainty that Christ was bodily raised from the dead on the third day. And we do not need sea stories about various men being swallowed by whales and surviving within them for a few days in order to know with absolute certainty that Jonah was swallowed by a great fish or whale and was preserved within this sea creature for three days. Why? Because God has revealed in His inspired Word that this is precisely what happened, and it is impossible for God to lie (Titus 1:2). Thus, dear ones, there is nothing more reasonable than to believe with absolute confidence the God of the Bible who cannot lie and to rest in the promises of the God who cannot lie.

D. But now as we turn our attention to the tomb in the sea in which Jonah was buried (i.e. the belly of the great fish), we read in Jonah 1:17: “And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.” These words in Jonah 1:17 are cited by the Lord Jesus as a sign to the unbelieving Pharisees who wanted Him to perform a special sign (or miracle) from heaven just for them. The Pharisees acted as though a special sign for them from heaven would be all that was needed to convince them that He was the Son of God, in spite of the fact that Christ had already provided many signs from heaven in healing all manner of sickness, in casting out demons, in raising the dead, and many more heavenly signs. Listen to the rebuke of Christ uttered against such unbelief on the part of the Pharisees: Read Matthew 12:39-40.

1. And so critics and skeptics today likewise issue challenges to God saying, “Show yourself in this room right now, and I will believe in you. Move this table right now, and I will believe in you. Lift me up from off the ground and suspend me in mid-air, and I will believe in you.” But all such challenges only reveal the foolishness and unwillingness of unbelieving man to receive by faith what the Lord has already revealed all around them in creation, has already revealed within them by way of the Light of Nature, and has already revealed in the Holy Scriptures. If one will not bow down in godly fear before God when all of creation shouts and declares the glory of its Creator, when the light within man must be consciously suppressed by man in order to keep it hidden, and when the truths of Scripture so clearly reveal that Christ was crucified, buried, and bodily raised from the dead, then no amount of Divine appearances or miraculous levitations will convince him. Such a sign (or miracle) will simply be explained away like every other revelation God has given of His being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth.

2. In fact, these very pharisaical sign-seekers in Matthew 12:39-40 knew that Jesus was bodily raised from the dead based upon the testimony of the guards that had watched over Christ’s sealed tomb, and yet these religious skeptics did not humbly bow before Jesus Christ in faith and godly fear (but rather concocted a lie and bribed the guards to spread the lie that Christ’s disciples secretly rolled the heavy stone away from the sealed tomb without waking the sleeping guards, which was a capital crime, Matthew 28:11-15).

3. Dear ones, where is your faith? In an awaited sign (or miracle) from God, or is your faith in Christ and His revealed Word and promises? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe (Jesus said to Thomas in John 20:29). Sadly, many today have to read a story of a four-year-old child who allegedly went to heaven in order to believe what God has revealed about the glories of heaven (not that it is impossible for God to take anyone to heaven and to bring him/her back to an earthly existence; for this very wonder happened to the Apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 12, but Paul was not allowed to tell of the things he saw in heaven). Dear ones, those who depend upon such alleged signs (rather than depending upon the infallible truth of God’s Word) will be prey to all manner of deception by wolves who come in sheep’s clothing (Matthew 7:22-23; 2 Thessalonians 2:9-12). We walk by faith in what God has revealed, and not by sight, depending upon signs and wonders to guide our faith. God can sovereignly give signs and wonders whenever He chooses, but such signs and wonders must always confirm the truth and not error (otherwise we will be misled and deluded by lying wonders). Do you cling to the promises of salvation by faith, or must you have moment by moment some inward emotion and feeling upon which your faith rests? It’s always encouraging to sense that inward testimony that you are the child of God, but dear ones, it is not a feeling that makes you a child of God. It is the promise of God that is realized by faith alone which bestows upon you the gracious gift of adoption into the family of God.

E. Now as we consider Jonah as a sign who pointed to Christ, in what ways was Jonah’s burial in the watery tomb of the whale’s belly and his resurrection to dry ground a sign of Christ’s burial in the stone tomb of the earth’s belly and His bodily resurrection from the dead? If Christ pointed to Jonah as a sign of what would certainly happen in His own burial and resurrection, Christ not only intended this sign as a rebuke and/or blessing for those living at that time, but also intended it as a rebuke and/or blessing for those living at the present time as well. How was Jonah a sign of Christ?

1. First, Jonah was a sign of Christ in that Jonah was buried in the heart of the sea, whereas Christ was buried in the heart of the earth. Whereas Jonah’s death and burial in the heart of the sea within the belly of the whale was a figurative death and burial (as we see in Jonah 2:1, “Then Jonah prayed unto the LORD his God out of the fish’s belly.”), Christ’s death and burial in the heart of the earth within the belly of the tomb was a literal and bodily death and burial (as we see in John 19:30-35).

2. Second, Jonah was also a sign of Christ in that Jonah was raised bodily from belly of the whale, whereas Christ was raised bodily from the belly of the earth. Once again, whereas Jonah’s resurrection

from the belly of the whale was a figurative resurrection (as we see in Jonah 2:10, “And the LORD spake unto the fish, and it vomited out Jonah upon the dry land.”), Christ’s resurrection from the belly of the tomb was a literal and bodily resurrection of the same body that had died on the cross and had been buried in the tomb (Luke 24:36-46).

3. Third, Jonah was also a sign of Christ in that Jonah was buried within the belly of the whale for “three days and three nights” before he was figuratively raised from the dead, just as Christ was buried within the belly of the tomb for “three days and three nights” before he was literally raised from the dead.

a. The time indicator of “three days and three nights” does not mean a literal period of 72 hours (i.e. three 12-hour days and three 12-hour nights) in the way the Scripture reckons such temporal terms. To the contrary, “three days and three nights” means 3 days or any part of 3 days. For in biblical reckoning, any part of a day was counted as a whole day (Esther 4:15-5:1, where “three days, night or day” does not mean three 24-hour days consisting of 72 hours, for the text in Esther 5:1 states that “on the third day”, not “after the third day” that the fast came to an end). So although Christ states that the Son of Man would be in the heart of the earth for “three days and three nights” (in Matthew 12:40), Christ also states that he would be raised from the dead “the third day” i.e. “ON the third day”, as is the emphasis of the Greek dative case used in these references to Christ’s resurrection (Matthew 16:21; Matthew 17:23; Matthew 20:19; Mark 9:31; Mark 10:34; Luke 9:22; Luke 18:33; Luke 24:7; Luke 24:21; Luke 24:46; Acts 10:40; 1 Corinthians 15:4).

b. Thus, Jesus was crucified on Friday (which was the preparation day before the Jewish Sabbath), was buried later that same day (which is day one), remained in the grave on the Jewish Sabbath (which is day two), and was raised from the dead early on the first day of the week or the Christian Sabbath (which is day three). Thus, Jonah is also a sign pointing to Christ in how long Jonah remained in the belly of the whale before he was brought forth on dry land.

c. Jonah was a historical sign pointing to the historical and bodily burial and resurrection of Christ from the dead (which was intended by Christ to strongly rebuke the unbelief of the Pharisees and to point them to one place (if not many places) in the Old Testament that by way of types, signs, and prophecies pointed to Christ as being the Son of God who voluntarily laid down His life to rescue undeserving sinners from eternal death and condemnation in hell, and was glorious raised bodily from the dead to demonstrate that He had accomplished redemption for His people. “It is finished” means “paid in full”. Christ’s bodily burial and bodily resurrection confirm this wondrous truth. But, dear ones, Jonah is also a sign given to us today to either rebuke us in our unbelief (our apathy and indifference) or to encourage us in our faith that the Bible is God’s inspired Word, and that all the promises of God are yea and amen to us in Christ Jesus.

II. Water Baptism—A Sign of our Burial with Christ (Colossians 2:12).

A. In the remaining few minutes, I would like for us to switch gears and to consider the relationship of water baptism to the burial and resurrection of Christ. For we who trust in Christ as our only hope of eternal salvation have been “buried with him in baptism” (i.e. buried with Christ in baptism). Baptism, dear ones, is a sign and seal of the blessedness of a believer’s crucifixion, burial, resurrection, and sitting with Christ at God’s right hand. Baptism points to these blessed promises and seals (confirms) these blessed promises for us as authentic promises made to us in the preached gospel and in the visible gospel of water baptism.

B. Dear ones, this very passage in Colossians 2 speaks of our covenantal union with Christ, namely that Christ was not crucified, nor was He buried for Himself, but He was crucified and was buried as the

federal head for all those He represented in the Covenant of Grace (so that all those whom Christ represented have covenantally and federally died and been buried to the guilt, penalty, and power of sin and have been raised with Jesus in His resurrection from that state of death to the glorious place of justification, adoption, and sanctification through the work of Jesus Christ).

1. Beloved, the Lord would not have us forget what He promises to us and to our children (death to the old man, and life to the new man through a blessed covenantal union with Jesus Christ). When you find yourself in the midst of great struggles and turmoil in warring against the old man of sin that would lead you to lean upon your own understanding, that old man that would lead you back into bondage to those besetting sins into which you have fallen so many times, that old man that would tempt you to cast the promises of God aside through forgetfulness or neglect, and that old man that would take you down the road where you live in slavish fear of the Lord and seek to earn His acceptance by your good deeds, your baptism is intended by the Lord to drive you back to the promise of death and burial with Christ and to drive you to the promise of life and reigning with Christ in the blessedness of justification in being declared righteous on the basis of Christ's righteousness alone, in the blessedness of belonging to God as an heir of God and joint heir with Christ, and in the blessedness of God continuing to work within you both to will and to do His good pleasure until you are finally perfected at the Day of Christ Jesus.

2. Dear ones, baptism is God's promise (signed, sealed, and delivered) that salvation is ours and our children's through the glorious work of Jesus Christ alone. And that blessed promise of death, burial, resurrection, and reigning with Christ belongs to our children as well. The promise is made in the preached gospel and in the visible gospel of baptism, but the promise made to us and to our children can only be realized by trusting in Christ and in the promise of salvation He makes unto us.

3. Just as circumcision in the Old Testament was the outward sign of inward circumcision (which speaks of the promise of God in cutting away the guilt, penalty, and power of sin), so baptism in the New Testament is simply the outward sign of inward circumcision (according to Colossian 2:11-12). In other words, what the sacrament of circumcision meant to believers and their children in the Old Testament, the sacrament of baptism means to believers and their children in the New Testament. As circumcision meant the cutting away of the guilt, penalty, and power of sin, so baptism means the burying of the guilt, penalty, and power of sin.

4. Dear ones, reap daily the ongoing benefits of your baptism (by meditating on the promise of death to sin and life to righteousness signified and sealed in your baptism, by renewing your covenant with the Lord on the basis of that same promise of covenantal union with Christ in His crucifixion, burial, resurrection, and sitting in victory at God's right hand, and by expressing with exceeding thankful hearts the joy of these covenantal promises made to you and received by faith alone, as well as reflecting on the serious responsibility that is ours and our children's if we should neglect so great a salvation). As Christian parents, you must not neglect to continually teach the same promises made to your children who have been baptized (as have been made to you as Christian parents) as your children grow up within your Christian home, that is, if you would see the fruit of these covenant blessings realized in the lives of your children for a thousand generations to come.

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