

PP Jonah: God's Relentless Grace

Jonah 1:17

10/25-26/2015

Illus William Lane Craig shares a story about a man who truly believed he was dead even though he was a living, normally functioning human being (Cotard Syndrome). Well, his wife persuaded him to visit a psychiatrist, who tried in vain to convince him that he was in fact alive. Finally, the psychiatrist hit upon a plan. He showed the man medical reports and scientific evidence that dead men do not bleed. After thoroughly convincing the man that dead men do not bleed, the psychiatrist took out a pin and pricked the man's finger. When the man saw the drop of blood trickle down his finger, his eyes grew wide. "Look here!" he cried, "Dead men do bleed after all!"

A *presupposition* is an assumption made before looking at the evidence

Let me give you a few presuppositions that people have had with the book of Jonah

Jonah was the son of the widow of Zarephath that Elijah cared for during the drought

Jonah had a dream in the ship when he was asleep in the storm, and he wrote it down in this book

Jonah is a copy of the myth of Hercules and the sea monster

Jonah's ship to Tarshish was wrecked and another ship rescued Jonah which had a fish for a figurehead, so it was storm-caused delirium

Jonah fell into the sea and found refuge in a dead fish floating on the water

This book more than any other in the Old Testament, has been challenged and ridiculed and the reason why it has is before us now in verse 17

***"And the LORD appointed a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights."* Jonah 1:17**

Notice this a '**great fish**', not necessarily a whale, but could this have happened?

What fish could have done this, and what about the gases and digestive juices?

So much effort by Christians has been expended to prove this could have happened, and an equal amount of effort by critics trying to prove that it couldn't

And what gets lost in either, is that this is supernatural act of God defying natural explanation

I believe the power of God does what can't be naturally explained-why it's called supernatural

I believe that God divided the Red Sea for the Israelites

I believe God made an axe head float for Elisha so it could be returned to its owner

I believe a donkey spoke to the greedy prophet Balaam to warn him and that water truly did come out of a rock to quench the dangerous thirst of the Israelites

I believe that Joshua prayed daylight to finish the battle and God stopped the rotation of the earth

In all of these, not only are there no scientific explanations, there is no way they could have happened naturally...they are miracles

Could God have sent a great fish to swallow Jonah, where the prophet stayed for 3 days, and was spit up on the shore alive?

My answer, *Of course, and I don't think God even broke a sweat!*

One of the most compelling reasons to believe He did is the testimony of Jesus Christ

***"For 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."* Matthew 12:40**

That being said, we last looked at Jonah as he was being picked up and thrown into the Mediterranean Sea in the midst of a huge cyclone
 Some here might remember the old Batman show that started with, *'When we last let our heroes'*
 The shows were designed to pick up where the previous one had left off
 If this were a Broadway show, then last week, Act 1 came to an end and the curtains came down, creating a cliffhanger effect
 Well, Act II begins, the curtain raises, when we come to verse 17
 And this verse functions like the heading or the title given to a newspaper story
"And the LORD appointed a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights." **Jonah 1:17**
 As Act II opens, it grabs our attention with several truths:

PP 1-God is absolutely sovereign

It is important to understand what is meant by God's sovereignty
PP It means that *God has the power and right to rule over, to order, and to control...everything*
 And to an unbeliever, there is no doctrine more despised than this
 It is completely contrary and oppositional to our desire to be in control of our own lives
 God's sovereignty decimates Sinatra's *My Way* humanistic lyrics
 Yet despite the rebellious attitude toward this doctrine, we have seen it on full display in the book of Jonah and certainly here in **verse 17**: ***"And the LORD appointed a great fish..."***
 Four times in this book we read that God **'appointed'**: this great fish, and later a plant, a worm, and a scorching east wind
 Think back with me over the events of this first chapter
 Jonah was a prophet of the LORD, meaning he was called by God to serve Him by functioning as His spokesperson
 God had commanded Jonah to go to the Assyrian city of Nineveh and preach against it
 Jonah refused to do it, submitted his resignation letter, and tried to flee to Tarshish
 But God threw a great wind on the Sea, and the mighty tempest forced His hiding, rebellious prophet out in the open
 The sailors, at Jonah's instructions, picked him up and threw him in the sea

But think of these events through the lens of God's sovereignty
 How amazing that Jonah went to Joppa and happened to find a ship ready to leave for Tarshish
 What impeccable timing, one so incredible that Jonah could have falsely concluded that God accepted his resignation letter and was letting him go, after all, I found a ship
 God could have stopped him on the way to Joppa like he did Balaam, another rebellious prophet
 God could have made sure there was no ship bound for Tarshish at that harbor town
 God could have sent a contrary wind, as He did with the ship the Apostle Paul was on in Acts 27, so that the ship couldn't have made progress

Several years ago, before I owned a cell phone, I had left the office to ride my mountain bike at Jacobsburg Park
 Halfway there, I realized that I had forgotten to bring my bike shoes which clip into the pedals
 I turned around and headed home to pick them up and as I pulled into the street of our development, I saw Denise getting ready to drive out

In the back of the van was our young son who had just, minutes before, broken his arm
 He had been playing on the fireman's pole on our swing set pretending he was Spiderman
 Denise had just hollered down to him not to jump off it, reminding him he has no super powers
 But he jumped anyways landing on his right arm, breaking both bones
 He came in the house holding his bent arm crying, saying, 'I don't have superhero powers'
 Leaving the other two of our children with a neighbor she heads to the hospital, but
'coincidentally', I just happen to pull in because I forgot my shoes
 It allowed me to take him to the hospital and Denise to take care of our kids
 I still thank God to this day that He used my memory lapse to get me home to be there for him
 And again, the skeptic says that was just a coincidence

PP And as I said last week, one person defined coincidence as *a miracle for which God chooses to remain anonymous*
 This is our sovereign God, Who has *has the power and right to rule over, to order, and to control...everything*

PP 2-God is relentlessly gracious

"And the LORD appointed a great fish to swallow up Jonah..." 17b

There are some who read this and think God is punishing His disobedient prophet, but have you considered that He had the great fish swallow him up *in order to save his life*?
 To defy an earthly ruler was usually to sign your own death warrant, so how much worse to defy the living God
 Jonah deserved to die for refusing to obey God's command
 Whether you like this or not, God would have been perfectly just to allow Jonah to sink to the bottom of that seabed and drown
 He is the Creator of all there is, the rightful Lord of all, and Jonah defied Him
 Can we pause for a moment and put ourselves in Jonah's watery robes for a moment?
 Which of us hasn't defied and disobeyed the Living God?
 Which of us deserves God's mercy, love and forgiveness?
 He isn't obligated to be gracious to us, for He owes us nothing
 If He owed us anything, it is damnation, for we have not only rebelled against Him personally, but every single one of us has hurt and harmed the people around us
 We've spitefully withheld forgiveness from those who've hurt us, lied and deceived to get our own way, been unmerciful to others, lusted after someone's body or possessions, been more committed to our own glory and honor than another's, or looked down on others in pride
 These and hundreds of other ways have carried out our rebelliousness
 So if God were to give us what we were owed, it would be everlasting punishment, every last one of us
 Yet He is gracious, giving us what we don't deserve, forgiving us and loving us and not because we earned it, but because He yearned for it
PP *"He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is His steadfast love toward those who fear Him"* Psalm 103:10-11

Now I want you to hear this: *God will never cast us aside when we are unfaithful!*
 His love is steadfast, He knows how to bring us back to Him and He will often do so in a great fish experience
 Has there been a 'great fish' experience that God has brought into your life...a difficult experience that has swallowed you up?
 An experience that has trapped us and seems, won't let us go
 It may be a job you hate but feel trapped in
 Or a love-less marriage that you are now trying to survive to the end
 Perhaps it is a child that is more difficult to raise than you ever imagined
 Notice this distinction: storms in life *terrify* us, and move our eyes to our circumstances
 But swallowed by a great fish *breaks* us, and moves our eyes to our hearts
 God has brought Jonah into a place where He has no choice but to look inward and then upward
 Friends, has God sent a great fish to swallow you up?
 Can you trust that God is absolutely sovereign?
 Do you think He doesn't know where you are, or the pain and discomfort you are in?

Yet being swallowed up by a stinking, slimy, dark great fish hardly feels like grace does it?
 Why didn't the Spirit of the Lord just carry him away to dry land like He carried away Philip?
 Why not just send a chariot of fire down to get him like He did with Elijah
 Or a giant eagle to get him...that's what happened to Gandalf...
 Why a great fish, and why did God have it '*swallow up Jonah*'
 The answer is found when we begin to realize, this is less about punishment and discipline and more about heart surgery...the fish experience is what will finally produce brokenness

PP 3-God is resolutely determined

When you raise your first child, everything that happens is frighteningly new
 Matthew, when he was very young, was with me at a youth leaders meeting and he's always been a great kid, one that I didn't have to keep a continual eye on
 My father would playfully say that he was a nosy kid, and we would counter with *He's curious*
 Well, the home we were meeting in had a second story with a balcony overlooking the living room, with a railing along the length of it for safety
 Suddenly, he cried out for me because somehow, he got his head stuck between the balusters
PP To picture this, I've provided some photos of a similar situations (*go back to Point 3*)
 How awful it would be if I told him that I would be up to help when my meeting was over...
 Yet it feels, well, excessive that God left Jonah "*in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.*" 17c

There are two keys to understanding the length of time Jonah was in that fish
 The first one is the reason, I believe, this book is so mocked and reviled by critics
 This verse is a sign that points forward to the death, burial and resurrection of Christ

PP "*I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that He was buried, that He was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures*" 1 Corinthians 15:3-4

Massive effort by critics has been expended to prove that neither Jonah or Christ's death, burial and resurrection never happened

But there is another key to understanding the length of Jonah's time in the great fish
 Verse 17 in the Hebrew Scriptures belongs with chapter 2, not chapter 1
 Knowing this, the very next verse is important, ***"Then Jonah prayed to the LORD his God
 from the belly of the fish" Jonah 2:1***

'Then' occurs after Jonah was in the belly of that fish for 3 days and nights
 It took being stuck in that great fish for those 3 days to get Jonah to arrive at brokenness
PP I want you to hear this clearly...*all our trials are custom-designed by our resolutely
 determined God to be exactly what we need to cry out to Him*

This is why we turned to Psalm 107 and looked at four different **'troubles'** or tight places that we
 get in, that move us to cry to the Lord for deliverance

It took 3 days in the belly of that fish for Jonah to cry out to God

God sent that fish to save more than Jonah's life, He put him in there for 3 days and nights to get
 to his rebellious heart and break it

If God has appointed a great fish to swallow you up and God, then God is doing surgery on your
 heart, and He will have it spit you out the moment His purposes are finished?

We will look more closely at the path of brokenness next week, and find the grace available to us

Let me close by bringing us back to what we have seen today

God is absolutely sovereign, He appoints hard times as well as good times, difficulties and
 blessings

Yet in both, His relentless grace is on full display

For He is resolutely determined to make us supremely joyful in Him and useful for Him, and to
 do that we must walk with him in faith and obedience

That storm in life, that great fish of trouble has swallowed you up for this very purpose!

Pray