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The Resurrection of Our Lord

### Jonah 2:1-10

#### **BREAKING FORTH FROM THE BELLY OF A FISH... BREAKING FORTH FROM THE HEART OF THE EARTH**

What's Jonah got to do with Easter Sunday? For that matter, what's Jonah got to do with you? The answer to both questions is the same: Christ.

It may seem strange to hear the account of Jonah on Easter Sunday. But Christ made the connection. More than once, when Christ's enemies demanded a sign, or proof, that He is the promised Savior of the world, Christ said, *"None will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth."*

We see one breaking forth from the belly of a fish. We see the Greater One breaking forth from the heart of the earth. It is because of Christ that we can hope to be preserved by God as Jonah was.

The account of Jonah is no fable. It is literal, factual history. He was truly swallowed by a giant fish and 3 days later was spit out again. So also the account of Christ's resurrection is literal, factual history. Christ died and was buried. But He truly, bodily came back to life and came out of the grave.

The account of Jonah sounds so implausible. Martin Luther commented, *"This was truly a strange and serious trial, so much so that I can hardly imagine a stranger one. In fact, I would not easily believe such things if the Holy Spirit had not written them."* But does not Christ's resurrection from the dead sound even more implausible? When have you ever heard of a stone-cold, dead body

without anyone else working on it, no medical teams, no life-support, no sustenance, rejuvenating itself to life?

But dear Christian friends, let's hope that God specializes in the implausible—especially as we know and feel any change for the better to some of our own dilemmas and life situations to be implausible. Let's hope God specializes in something as implausible as breaking forth from the belly of a fish or breaking forth from the heart of the earth.

It was bad enough for Jonah that he was tossed into the middle of the ocean. But imagine the absolute terror and sheer despair Jonah must have felt when a gigantic ocean beast approached and swallowed him. This is it. This is the end. There's no getting out of this. Imagine how putrid it must have been inside the fish's stomach. And worst of all, Jonah had only himself to blame. He had not been innocently ambushed by this mishap. He had brought it on himself by trying to avoid God. He must have believed right then that God had sealed his fate.

Jonah's misery and desperation prompted him to look to God for help. So often God causes or allows our desperation to prompt us to repent, to turn back to Him and look to Him for mercy. Listen again to Jonah's prayer: *In my distress I called to the LORD, and he answered me. From the depths of the grave I called for help, and you listened to my cry. You hurled me down into the deep, into the very heart of the seas, and the currents swirled about me; all your waves and breakers swept over me. I said, "I have been banished from your sight; yet I will look again toward your holy temple." The engulfing waters threatened me, the deep surrounded me; seaweed was wrapped around my head. To the roots of the mountains I sank down; the earth beneath barred me in forever.*

Then the miraculously unexpected happened. Jonah said: *But you brought my life up from the pit, O LORD my God. When my life was ebbing away, I remembered you, LORD, and my prayer rose to you, to your holy temple.* Not even thousands of feet of water, nor blankets of fish blubber could block God's power or God's kindness from reaching one of His believing children.

That's because there is another who suffered far worse terrors than Jonah, who sank to much deeper depths, who was immersed in something much more putrid than stomach bile, and who was swallowed, not by a fish, but by the very earth itself as He was laid in a tomb. That person is Christ. On the cross He lay open to the darkest terrors of God's unforgiving anger. In suffering He sank to a degree lower than the depths of the lowest levels of hell. He was awash with the bile of sin, slathered with the guilt of every person on earth. Misery and desperation prompted him to cry out, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" By God's holy justice death was His destination. There was no alternative. There was no rescue like there had been for Jonah.

But on the third day the most unexpected thing happened, something more amazing than being spit out by a fish –something that caught everyone –even the disciples and especially the guards –off guard! Christ broke forth from the heart of the earth. Death could not keep Him! The earth could not hold Him in! The grave could not confine Him! He is too big and too powerful. He fills all the universe.

Jonah's breakout from the belly of a fish proved, when he later went to preach to the city of Nineveh, his authority as a prophet of God. Christ's breakout from the heart of the earth proves His authority as the Son of God. His resurrection proves and demonstrates that the death of the Son of God has paid for our sins completely. We are forgiven. We are rescued.

Had Christ stayed dead we'd have had to assume that God is still holding our sins against us. But because of Christ's resurrection we know we can turn to God for mercy even in our most impossible circumstances, even when they are circumstances that we got ourselves into by our own sins. For Jesus' sake He has forgiven us. He still loves us. He hears our every plea like a compassionate father. He did not abandon Christ in the grave. He did not abandon Jonah in the belly of a fish. He will not abandon you to death or any difficulties swirling around you no matter how hopelessly confusing or impossible. He provided a way, namely by trusting

Jesus, that we escape the punishment for our sins and so that we can have life with Him for eternity. By His own promise He makes good and salvation emerge from the darkest, most difficult hopeless situations for His believers. By His own promise one day we will break forth from the earth, out of our own graves, with new, glorified bodies like His own to be with Him forever.

Jonah's prayer concludes, *Those who cling to worthless idols forfeit the grace that could be theirs. But I, with a song of thanksgiving, will sacrifice to you. What I have vowed I will make good. Salvation comes from the LORD!* Yes, what's left for us to do but to thank God and to tell others. Just like the story of Jonah, Christ's resurrection is something no one could ever have come up with in a million years unless someone told them. It is such joyful news because it reveals to us what our God is like, what He thinks of us, and to what extent He will go to save us, whether it's breaking forth from the belly of a fish, or breaking forth from the heart of the earth.