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“The same Savior Who during His ministry said, ‘I have come that they might have life and have it more abundantly’ (John 10:10), was guiding and controlling the great fish so that Jonah ‘might have life.’”

JONAH IS SWALLOWED BY A GREAT FISH – JONAH 1:17

Several decades ago, a motion picture captivated large audiences with its portrayal of a large fish pursuing swimmers and boaters. “Jaws” was a huge box office success. “Jaws” was not a gentle dolphin which could be played with; “Jaws” was a huge hungry fish waiting for its next victim to come across its path.

The movie “Jaws” managed to frighten young and old alike. For some, swimming in the ocean ceased to be a joy. “Jaws” was fiction, but the account of Jonah being swallowed by a large fish is fact! God’s word tells us, “There is the sea, vast and spacious, teeming with creatures beyond number — both large and small.” (Psalm 104:25)

As Jonah was being cast into the churning sea, God had His radar set on a large fish which He had created and He was guiding it to the very spot where His wandering prophet Jonah had entered the water.

We can’t help but wonder about the degree of terror Jonah experienced as he saw his personal “Jaws” approaching him.

Jonah went from the belly of a ship where he was trying to forget who he was, to the belly of a great fish where God reminded him who he was. He was God’s prophet!

JONAH LIVES INSIDE OF THE GREAT FISH

Jonah lived inside of the great fish for three days and three nights. Jesus, the Son of God, verified this account while here on earth. He told the Pharisees and the teachers of the Law, “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." (Matthew 12:40)

The timeless God who says that "a day is like 1,000 years," is not only here speaking of His resurrection, but also of our resurrection.

Just as Jonah came out of a seemingly impossible life and death situation, so our Savior Jesus actually came out of His grave making the way for each of us who believe in Him, to also come forth from our grave when we hear His voice calling our name.

Scripture tells us that Christ is "the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep." (1 Corinthians 15:20) But then Scripture addresses each of us with our own good news. "And just as we have borne the image of the earthly man [Adam], so shall we bear the image of the heavenly Man [the resurrected Christ]." (1 Corinthians 15:49).

The hymn writer Stephen Starke wrote about this great day:

*"All the earth with joy is sounding:
Christ has risen from the dead!
He, the greater Jonah, bounding
From the grave, His three-day bed,
Wins the prize: Death's demise-
Songs of triumph fill the skies."*

LSB 462, v. 1

JONAH PRAYS – JONAH 2:1-9

Prayer may not have been an active part of Jonah's life recently, but prayer suddenly became Jonah's lifeline. It was his only way of reaching out to his God who had the hairs on his head (which most likely were standing on end right now) all numbered.

The psalmist tells us, "God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging." (Psalm 46:1-3)

Jonah had fallen into the heart of the sea with its waters roaring, foaming and surging. He needed God to be his "refuge and...present help in trouble."

It was a distressed, fearful Jonah who called to the Lord for help. He was, in "the depths of the grave." (v. 2)

We are not told that Jonah simply "said" a prayer, but that Jonah "cried out" to the Lord his God. Jonah's personal relationship with the Lord was suddenly *all and everything to him!*

We, like Jonah, have fearful times in our lives. But we have an awesome loving God, Who knows each of our trials and tells us, What times you are afraid — Trust in Me. (Psalm 56:3)

"Jonah strongly declares, 'Salvation comes from the Lord.'"

FEAR AND FAITH TAKE TURNS IN JONAH'S HEART

Despair gripped Jonah when he cried out to the Lord, "I have been banished from your sight." But God did not leave Jonah in his despair. God reached into Jonah's distressed, sinful heart and encouraged His wayward prophet so that he could utter words of faith and hope: "Yet I will look again toward Your holy temple." (v. 4) Solomon had prayed to the Lord when dedicating the temple, "May your eyes be open toward this temple night and day... so that you will hear the prayer your servant prays toward this place." (1 Kings 8:29) Jonah remembered God's Word as he prayed.

Jonah had turned his face away from sin and toward the Lord. But Jonah's terror had not yet ended. Even though "faith and hope" had sustained him, the water was at his throat. He was drowning. He was tangled in seaweed and the mighty waves tossed him like a lead weight to the bottom of the sea. (v. 5)

But hope does not disappoint. Jonah tells us so, "You brought my life up from the pit, O Lord my God." (v. 6) Prayer, even Jonah's prayer from the bottom of the sea and from the bottom of his spiritual life, rose to heaven and the Lord God became his stronghold to which he clung. (v. 7)

Jonah's prayer ends with a song of thanksgiving. God's grace had seen him through his dreadful encounter with death. Jonah strongly declares, "Salvation comes from the Lord." (v. 9)

GOD SPEAKS TO THE GREAT FISH – JONAH 2:10

It was easier for God to control the great fish than to control His prophet Jonah. God simply spoke to the great fish and Jonah was released from its protective innards. He was vomited onto the shore. (It has been suggested that three days of undigested Jonah was all the fish could tolerate.) We can only imagine Jonah's relief when he found himself lying on the sandy shores of the Mediterranean, breathing deeply to fill his foul lungs with fresh air. Most likely he basked in the sunshine once his eyes had again adjusted to light. Then he probably waded into the cleansing salt water and washed the slime from his body and his clothes.

Jonah had experienced God's Word at work in his life. The Lord had kept him from all harm — He had watched over his life; the Lord had watched over Jonah's comings and goings. (Psalm 121:7-8) We also experience God's keeping power in our lives on both our comings and our goings.

Our God asks us to "pray without ceasing." (1 Thessalonians 5:17) He desires to hear our voices and to see our hearts lifted to Him steadily in prayer.

He invites us, "in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God." Then He adds a promise we all desire, "the peace of God ... will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 4:6-7)

J. Sidlow Baxter had this to say about Jonah's prayer from inside of the great fish: "It consists of thanksgiving, contrition and rededication. It is a — 'Te Deum'; a doxology — the novelty of singing a doxology — inside a

great fish in mid-ocean is absolutely without rival."

*Jonah, go and tell them
God has heard your prayer.
You're once again set free
To speak God's prophetic word.*

CONCLUSION

In the movie, "Jaws" was a large killer fish. In the book of Jonah, the large fish was a protective, life-sparing fish.

The same Savior Who during His ministry said, "I have come that they might have life, and have it to the full" (John 10:10), was guiding and controlling the great fish so that Jonah "might have life." In time, Jonah's life would become an abundant life as he carried God's Word to the Ninevites.

*God saved Jonah's life — miraculously
and*

*God saves each of us who believe in Jesus as our
Savior — miraculously*

Let us worship and praise Him!

An Aside:

"The skeletal remains of an enormous fish were found near Joppa. (Where Jonah had embarked on his voyage.) They were taken to Rome where their display caused great curiosity. The ribs appeared more in height than those of an Indian elephant and the length of the bones were 40 feet." G. Townsend

PERSONAL APPLICATION – JONAH 3:1-10

Heavenly Father, You gave Jonah a message for his generation of sinful people, which brought them to their knees in repentance. Place your message for our generation on each of our lips, And give us willing hearts, empowered by Your Holy Spirit, to speak Your Word with boldness, but also with love. Amen

Jonah 3:1-3

1. State what you know about Nineveh. (Genesis 10:6-12; Nahum 1:14, 3:1-3, 18-19)

2. God could have sent someone other than Jonah to carry His message to Nineveh. Why do you think He gave Jonah a second chance?

3. When we are going through difficult times, we often make promises to God which are later forgotten. What promise had Jonah made while inside of the great fish? (2:9b)

4. How was Jonah now carrying out the promise he had made to God while inside of the great fish?

5. Have you ever made a promise to God while you were going through difficult times? Were you able to fulfill your promise?

6. Whose message was Jonah being called to deliver to the Ninevites? (Jonah 3:1-2)

7. Apply Proverbs 3:5-6 to the call God placed on Jonah's life. Also apply it to your own life.

8. Jonah ran and attempted to hide from the Lord when he was called the first time. What are we now told about Jonah?

9. How is Nineveh described in v. 3?

Jonah 3:4-5

10. What did Jonah begin doing the first day he entered Nineveh? What was his message?

11. How did the pagan residents of Nineveh respond to Jonah's message?
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12. Since the Ninevites did not have God's Law as the Israelites had, how were they able to correctly respond to Jonah's preaching? (Romans 2:12-15)
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13. Most likely Jonah was a gifted preacher. Do you think he was responsible for the people of Nineveh responding as they did? (Romans 10:17)
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14. How did the people of Nineveh demonstrate their repentance?
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15. What was taking place in heaven because of the Ninevites repentance? (Luke 15:7)
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Jonah 3:6-10

16. How did the king of Nineveh personally respond to Jonah's message? (Jonah 3:6)
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17. What further action did the king take?
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- List his requirements and comment on them. (Jonah 3:7-8)
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18. What statement made by the king reveals some knowledge of Jehovah, the God of Israel? (Jonah 3:9; Psalm 103:8-10; Lamentations 3:22)
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19. How did God respond to the repentant Ninevites? (Lamentations 3:31-33)
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20. How does God respond to us when we have repentant hearts? (Isaiah 1:18)
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21. What will the people of Nineveh do on Judgment Day, and why will they be allowed to do so? (Matthew 12:41)
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