

He is not here! He Has Risen! – Jonah 2:2-9

Pastor Colin Rieke – April 16, 2017

² “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. ³ You hurled me into the deep, into the very heart of the seas, and the currents swirled about me; all your waves and breakers swept over me. ⁴ I said, ‘I have been banished from your sight; yet I will look again toward your holy temple.’ ⁵ The engulfing waters threatened me, the deep surrounded me; seaweed was wrapped around my head. ⁶ To the roots of the mountains I sank down; the earth beneath barred me in forever. But you brought my life up from the pit, O LORD my God. ⁷ “When my life was ebbing away, I remembered you, LORD, and my prayer rose to you, to your holy temple. ⁸ “Those who cling to worthless idols forfeit the grace that could be theirs. ⁹ But I, with a song of thanksgiving, will sacrifice to you. What I have vowed I will make good. Salvation comes from the LORD.”

This is the day the Lord has risen, let us rejoice and be glad in it,

Imagine what that day would have been like. Imagine what that weekend would have been like in Jerusalem. What began with such promise with one of the great festivals of the Jews (Passover), turned into a bloody mutilation. It seemed like the religious leaders finally got what they wanted – Jesus, the great prophet and teacher dead. Thanks to the generosity of one of his followers, his body had a tomb in which to lay, but hasty preparations were made because of the Jewish Sabbath. Now the Sabbath had passed, and these two women (as Matthew recalls them) woke up early on Sunday morning, mournfully gathered their perfumes and ointments for the body, and took the short walk outside of Jerusalem to properly bury Jesus’ body.

When all of a sudden, everything was out of sorts. A great earthquake happened, an angel rolled back the stone on his grave, and the women were facing a grave that was empty. It came as such a shock, it came as such a surprise. But it really shouldn’t have. If only they would have remembered the words of Jesus only a month or two before. Had they remembered those words, then maybe they would have been expecting this result, or at least they wouldn’t have been as surprised.

The words to which I’m referring is when Jesus confronted some of those same religious leaders, the Pharisees. These Pharisees wanted a miracle from Jesus to prove his authority. And do you know what Jesus said? He said, **“A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a miraculous sign! But 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.”** Just as Jonah came forth from the fish onto dry ground, so Jesus would come forth from the grave alive again. The sign of Jonah, that’s what Jesus was going to give them. This is just one of a number of occasions that Jesus predicted his resurrection. The resurrection we celebrate today.

When we look at the sign of Jonah, when we look at the story of Jonah, we begin to see some similarities between Jonah's situation and Christ's. And it is in the prayer of Jonah, that actually captures the wonderful Easter message we remember today. HE IS NOT HERE! HE HAS RISEN!

1. The grave swallowed him but
2. The grave could not hold him

(1)

The normal expectation for someone who dies, is that they will stay dead. That's certainly what Jesus' followers felt, even though they had heard Jesus say the opposite multiple times. It would generally be accurate to say that the grave will swallow up each one of us – whether we want it to or not, and we will have no power over it. Death and the grave are far more powerful than we are. And the same was true for the prophet Jonah.

Quick summary of the Jonah story. Jonah was a reluctant prophet. God told him to go to the ancient Assyrian capital of Nineveh and preach to it, but Jonah high-tailed it in the opposite direction. He got on a boat and tried sailing away from God. But God had other plans. God very easily could have struck him with a bolt of lightning, food poisoning and be done with him. But he didn't, he had other plans. He instead sent a terrible storm, and the only way the storm would subside is if Jonah threw himself overboard, threw himself at the mercy of God.

Anyone who has been on choppy water knows how scary that can be in a boat. Just imagine what that would have been like without a boat. Talk about a fear of drowning. And this is exactly how Jonah began to feel. Jonah describes it with these verses, **"You hurled me 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.'**" Jonah recognized his situation. He was as good as dead in the middle of the Mediterranean Sea. The grave was swallowing him. And then God sent a great fish to swallow Jonah.

Already here we can see some of the comparisons and contrasts between Jesus and Jonah. Jonah ran away, while Jesus turned the other cheek to those striking him. Jonah's brush with death was because of his own rebellion; Jesus died for the sins of others. Jonah almost died; Jesus did die. Jonah waited in the fish's belly for the Lord to bring him back to an earthly life; Jesus waited in the grave for his Father to raise him.

Up until that first Easter Sunday morning, the grave had swallowed everyone. Even those few people who had been raised from the dead, eventually would have died again, the grave would have swallowed them, just as the grave swallowed Jonah, and just as the grave swallowed Jesus. The grave is the ultimate enemy of us all. Because the grave is the ultimate punishment for our sins, or our rebellion against God. And after Good Friday, when Jesus died, Mankind's last remaining hope for beating the grave seemed to have been conquered as well.

But then Easter Sunday happened. Something changed, something changed forever. The grave may have swallowed Jesus, but the grave could not hold him. It was the Lord who provided a fish for Jonah in order to save him from the depths of the sea, and it was the Lord who then commanded the fish to release Jonah on dry land. The same was true of Jesus. God provided Jesus' body a place to lay when he was dead, but then on Easter Sunday, the grave could not hold him. It was not possible for Jesus to remain dead, he had more power than death. And with a great earthquake he showed this to the world.

After the earthquake on that first Easter Sunday, the women came to the tomb, wondering what had happened. The stone that had been rolled in front of the tomb had been cast aside, the guards who were guarding the tomb were nowhere to be found. But an angel, the angel who had removed the stone and now sat on it, told the women the most beautiful words that they had ever heard: **"Do not be afraid...HE IS NOT HERE; HE HAS RISEN!"** Normally when something isn't where you expect it to be, that is reason to worry. Your keys aren't where you left them, you worry. Your kid's aren't where you expect them to be, you worry. But not with Jesus. The fact that Jesus wasn't where they expected him to be (in the tomb), is reason for them to rejoice. And it's reason for us to rejoice as well. And all of this rejoicing can be summarized with the closing words of Jonah's prayer: **"Salvation comes from the Lord."**

For Jonah, this initial salvation came in the form of God saving him from drowning in the Mediterranean. But Jonah had in mind something even greater than that. It is the salvation that Jesus brought. **"Salvation comes from the Lord."** Do you know what Jesus rising from the dead on Easter Sunday means for you? It means salvation is yours. It means your sins, your crimes, your rebellion against God is paid for. It means you don't have to be afraid of God. It means you don't have to be afraid of death. It means you will live forever with God in heaven. All of this comes because Jesus Christ rose from the dead on Easter Sunday. Because he lives, I will live also, and I will worship him and serve him without end.

The most dangerous people in this world are people who are not afraid. They are dangerous, because they cannot be controlled or manipulated by fear. If death is the greatest thing that we have to fear, and if Christians no longer fear that, we can change the world. We know that one day the grave will swallow us. But we also know because of Jesus, that the grave will not hold us. It is this knowledge that a Christian has that changes everything. Our lives will never be the same, they cannot be the same.

It makes no sense for us to go on living like we would have before. It makes no sense for us to blindly follow after the "wisdom" of the world, when it conflicts with the true wisdom of God. It makes no sense for us to sit on our butts after we hear this good news. See what happened to the women? See what happened to Jonah?

After salvation which came from the Lord was revealed to them, both Jonah and the women went out and told others about it. Jonah went to the city of Nineveh and told others that salvation comes only from the Lord. The two Mary's ran from the tomb to share the wonderful news that Jesus was no longer dead.

It doesn't matter if this is your first time hearing and understanding the Easter message, or if you've heard and understood it for years. It doesn't matter if you've faithfully listened to God's Word throughout the year, or if you were dragged off the couch for the first time in a year. It doesn't matter, because the message hasn't changed. Each Easter we have renewed joy to proclaim: HE IS NOT HERE! HE HAS RISEN! If this is a message that has affected you, you can bet that this is a message someone else needs to hear as well. HE IS NOT HERE! HE HAS RISEN! Amen.