***Jonah***

**Bible Study – Scene 3**

**Jonah 1:17-2:10**

Dr. Reed Lessing in his Concordia Commentary (CC) of Jonah divides his remarks on Jonah into seven scenes. This is the third section.

First person singular Hebrew forms (“I,” “me,” etc., as subject, object, or possessive) occur twenty-four times in Jonah’s psalm, indicating that he is on center stage. In contrast, references to Yahweh appear sixteen times. If the psalm evokes traditional terminology, Jonah subverts it in significant ways to place himself in the spotlight. Yet, try as Jonah might, Yahweh still has the first and last words. (CC)

But Jonah would rather not admit this—at least not completely. The prophet’s deception peaks when he contrasts himself favorably with those who heed empty idols and forsake Yahweh’s loyal love (2:9 [ET2:8]). No doubt Jonah has in mind people like the sailors in chapter 1 and the Ninevites in chapter 3, but in the end they, unlike Jonah, become models of true faith and piety. Thus Jonah’s judgment on idolaters becomes a judgment against himself. (CC)

This interpretation of Jonah’s psalm gains more credence when it is read within the context of the entire narrative. Based upon the prophet’s confessions of Yahweh in 1:9 and 4:2, it would seem that when Jonah affirms Israelite traditional theology, his true words are ironic in their context. In 1:9 Jonah describes Yahweh as “the God of the heavens, … who made the sea and the dry land,” while Jonah is fleeing from the land to the sea to escape this God! In 4:2 Jonah cites Yahweh’s magnificent Gospel attributes—“a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger, abounding in loyal love and changing your verdict about evil”—while Jonah is raging because Yahweh is just that! Just so, the same irony is wrapped up in this psalm. Where does Jonah confess his sins? Where does he vow to fulfill his mission to Nineveh? Nowhere! This disconnect correlates with the fish vomiting out Jonah at the point where he says, “Salvation belongs to Yahweh.” Enough of this! The fish vomits out Jonah precisely so he can take Yahweh’s salvation to the Ninevites, which he was loathe to do. (CC)

1. By providing this “great fish” what in essence is God providing for Jonah?
2. Jesus refers to Jonah’s three-day stay in the belly of the great fish (Matthew 12:40). What parallel does Jesu see between Jonah’s experience and what would happen to Jesus Himself? (LL)

Jonah’s prayer is a psalm of thanksgiving for deliverance from death in the sea. Jonah recalls his prayer for help as he was sinking into the depths. His gratitude is heightened by his knowledge that he deserved death but that God had shown him extraordinary mercy. The language of this song indicates that Jonah was familiar with the praise literature of the Psalms. (CSB)

1. In verse 3 when it states “in my distress I called” what is really Jonah’s purpose in praying?
2. Read verses 2-6. What do you think Jonah was thinking?
3. In the midst of this scary situation Jonah has a sense of hope (v. 7). What do you think caused him to have confidence?
4. In reading verse 10 what impression must one come away with?
5. What can you learn from these verses?

**Some Answers to the above Questions:**

**1. The fish, then, is provided by Yahweh as a “means of grace” to save Jonah from Sheol and return him to life, communion with Yahweh in worship (2:5, 7–9), and the place (“dry land,” 2:10 where he can reassume the commission he had previously abandoned. (CC)**

**We are not told specifically what kind of sea creature God selected to rescue Jonah. Most often people think of a whale, because the animal would need to be very large. Israelites, like other ancient people, did not use the modern classifications for animals (e.g., distinguishing ocean mammals from fish). Their classifications tended to focus on an animal’s habitat and locomotion (Gn 1:20–25; 9:2). Some interpreters saw in this beast an emblem of our eternal struggle. Irenaeus of Lyons: “From the beginning, did God permit man to be swallowed up by the great whale [Satan], who was the author of transgression” (*ANF* 1:449–50). (TLSB)**

**2. Jesus refers to Jonah as a sign for the Pharisees. Jonah was in the belly of a fish for three days and nights (all or part of them, so the Son of Man would be three days and nights in the heart of the earth. Christ was predicting His death, burial, and resurrection. (LL)**

**3. The first word in Jonah’s psalm is קָ֠רָאתִי, “I called out.” This is the same verb that Yahweh (1:2), the captain (1:6), and the sailors (1:14) used in seeking help to alleviate life-threatening danger. In chapter 1 Jonah was unwilling to “call” (preach) to Nineveh to save it from divine judgment or to “call” upon Yahweh to save the foundering ship. But now, Jonah is finally calling to Yahweh, fulfilling Yahweh’s command that he “call” (וּקְרָ֣א, 1:2). Yet ironically, the prophet is only calling out for his own sake! Jonah 2:2 sharply emphasizes the first person singular nature of the prophet’s prayer. The call has come to Yahweh, but it is not for the sake of the sailors or the Ninevites; it is only for Jonah himself. Jonah only calls when *his* life is on the line. (**CC)

**4. Jonah recognized that his brush with death by drowning was God’s doing. (TLSB)**

**Jonah felt forsaken by God, just as Jesus felt separation from His Father while on the cross (Mt 27:46). (TLSB)**

**Jonah was speaking from a real life experience. Oceanographers tell us there are high mountains rising from the sea floor as well as deep canyons (see Psalm 18:15). When Jonah came to rest in such a sea canyon, he saw the high cliffs above were barring his escape like the gates of a prison. (PBC)**

**5. Jonah was obviously well versed in Scripture. Now he is remembering a number of them in his prayer and gaining confidence from them.**

**6. This is still the Savior’s story. He is active in the lives of all His creatures – animals, plants, fish, as well as man. If only His rational creatures were as obedient as the rest of His creation! (PBC)**