

The Sign of Jonah

Resurrection Morning

Scripture: Matthew 12:38-40

Sermon Series: Matthew

Topic: Jesus, Resurrection, Three Days, Easter

Matthew 12:38-42 (ESV)

³⁸ Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered him, saying, "Teacher, we wish to see a sign from you." ³⁹ But he answered them, "An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. ⁴⁰ 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. ⁴¹ The men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, something greater than Jonah is here. ⁴² The queen of the South will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and behold, something greater than Solomon is here.

Introduction

What is the sign of Jonah?

Was Jonah really three days in the belly of a fish?

Was Jesus really three days in the "heart of the earth?"

Is there truly a coming final Day of Judgment?

Are the scribes and Pharisees in danger of eternal condemnation because they hate Jesus?

Will the "men of Nineveh" and the "queen of the South" be resurrected at the Judgment and condemn the scribes and Pharisees?

Does Jesus believe that he is greater than the prophet Jonah and greater than Solomon?



We Wish to See a Sign

The scribes and Pharisees have come to Jesus and asked him a question.

Matthew 12:38-39 (ESV) ³⁸ Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered him, saying, "Teacher, we wish to see a sign from you." ³⁹ But he answered them, "An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah."

The scribes and Pharisees have come to Jesus seeking an on-the-spot sign that irrefutably proves he was sent from God, but such a sign is not what they are truly looking for. If it was, then the more than a dozen miracles that Jesus had already shown them—including raising a girl from dead¹—would have been sufficient for them. They were not seeking a sign that Jesus was God's anointed one, but rather they were seeking an occasion to condemn and destroy² Jesus. They wanted to see him dead. Jesus' answer to those conspiring to kill him was to say to them their sign-seeking was evil and "**no sign will be given to you...**" Last week together we learned that claiming to seek a sign from God, while ignoring the signs he's already given, is evil and exposes the fact that the person is not truly a child of God. God will not respond positively to such evil sign-seeking.

However, we also saw, that God does *occasionally*—but not normally—give signs. Jesus says, "**the sign of Jonah will be given.**" God does occasionally give signs, but only to those who are his children; who need to be reminded of God's promises, who have weak in faith and need their faith strengthened, who need to see God's word and will confirmed, and who are obeying the truth God has already given to them. To these among his children God sometimes does give an occasional sign, but these are rare and not normal events. The normal ways that God leads his children is through 1) persistent prayer, 2) regularly reading of the Bible, 3) obvious obedience³, 4) willing surrender, and 5) walking in wisdom of trustworthy and godly people.

What About the Sign of Jonah?

But what about the "**sign of the prophet Jonah?**" Last week we did not have time to consider this. But now we do. In speaking to the scribes and Pharisees, as well as to the other Jews listening to this conversation, Jesus assumes his audience knows the story of Jonah. A Jewish audience would have known about "the prophet Jonah," but a Gentile audience 2,000 years later may need a little help.

Who is the Prophet Jonah?

Jonah is a prophet. Generally, a prophet is one who speaks on behalf of another. Biblically speaking, a prophet is a man whom God has chosen to speak to his fellow man on behalf of

¹ Matthew 9:23-25.

² Matthew 12:14.

³ That is, obeying the commands of God in his word which are clear and obvious.

God, i.e. whatever God tells him to speak. Jonah is a man called by God to say what God told him to say.

The story of Jonah is found in the Old Testament (OT) book by the same name, which is found after Obadiah and before Micah. It is very small book. It's one page and half in my Bible. It has only four chapters but you can read the whole of it in less that 14 minutes.

Jonah prophesied during the reign of Jeroboam II, who was king from 782-753 B.C. Some estimates are that the events of Jonah took place around 760 B.C.

To Nineveh. God called Jonah to leave Israel and go and preach repentance to the city of Nineveh in the Assyrian empire. It is known for it's iconic walls.



Nineveh is located near the modern city of Mosul in northern Iraq along the eastern bank of the Tigris river. It was a non-Israelite, pagan city and one of the oldest Assyrian cities, dating back to about 4000 B.C.⁴

Fishtown. The city name derived from a composite Sumerian - Akkadian word, *nūnu*, which means 'fish.' One of their deities was a "fish-goddess" named "Nanshe." She may very well may have been the "chief deity" of the city.⁵ Thus, the name Nineveh means something like, "Fishtown"⁶ or the "house of fish," wherein the fish-goddess was worshiped.

Nineveh is located about 500 miles north east of Israel. Jonah did not want to go there and preach, so he went to the port city of Joppa and boarded a ship going to Tarshish, which was in the opposite direction of where God called him to go.



A Ship to Tarshish. At some point while the ship was crossing the Mediterranean, God caused a terribly tempestuous storm to arise and the ship was severely battered. Jonah discerned that it was his own rebellion that was the cause of the storm. Therefore he

⁴ Eugene H. Merrill, "The Sign of Jonah," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, vol. 23/1, March 1980, p. 26.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

suggested, that the sailors throw him overboard. They reluctantly agreed. When the tossed him overboard, the storm immediately stopped and Jonah was swallowed by “*a great fish*” (Jon 1:17).

Jonah 1:17 (ESV) 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.

We often mentally connect this “great fish” with a whale, but the biblical text simply says, “a great fish,” meaning a *large* fish. Jonah remained inside the belly of this large fish for three days. It is unclear whether Jonah died while in that gastro-acidic darkness or if he merely came close to death, but from the perspective of sailors, and any other outside observers, *his life was over*. Yet, God was not finished with Jonah. God had work for him to do and it involved doing what God had ordained him to do, namely, to go and preach repentance to the godless Gentiles of Nineveh.

Jonah 2:10 (ESV) And the LORD spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah out upon the dry land.

God sovereignly, powerfully, and authoritatively reigns over all of his creation, including everything from the storms in the sky to the fish in the sea. God commanded this great fish to cough up the contents of his stomach. And this great fish obeyed. Presumably he spit Jonah out farther north along the Mediterranean coast in order to expedite this trip to Nineveh.

This time Jonah obeyed. We made the journey to Nineveh, he called the whole city to repent or be destroyed by God’s righteous wrath in forty days. The people listened. They believed his message and repented. God was merciful and gracious to them and the people of the great city of Nineveh, with a population of 120,000⁷, turned from their sins⁸ and believed in the God of Israel through the preaching of Jonah.

Jonah was God’ prophet, whom he sent to the Gentile city of Nineveh, to preach a message of repentance in order to turn them away from certain destruction and to obedience and salvation by believing in the God of Israel. The Ninevites received Jonah and believed in God through him and thus they were saved.

The Sign of the Prophet Jonah

So *what is the sign of the prophet Jonah?* Did Jonah do some miracle to prove to the people of Nineveh that he was sent by God? Or was the sign his preaching? Or something else? No, Jonah did no miracle. The sign was not his preaching. Jesus explains what he means by “the sign of the prophet Jonah” in the next verse.

⁷ Jonah 4:11.

⁸ Jonah 3:8-9.

Matthew 12:40 (ESV) “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.”

Jonah himself was a sign to the people of Nineveh. The sign was the fact that he “*was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish.*” When Jonah arrived in Nineveh and began preaching that “*the city would be overthrown in forty days,*”⁹ evidently the people asked who he was and from where he came. He told them. Jonah told them that he had been delivered to them from a fish, in whose belly he spent three days, and he came to them with a message from God for them. Given their previous worship of fish deities, no doubt this got their attention. A messenger came to them by way of a fish—which they connected with God—therefore, they most certainly would have listened!

The Smell of the Prophet Jonah?

No doubt Jonah had the smell to prove that his story was true. One cannot help but wonder if his smell rather than his message was what initially caused curiosity. Fish smells are hard to wash off even after the briefest of encounters. Have you ever mistakenly left fish parts in the kitchen trash can over night? The next morning you can take out the trash, but the kitchen will likely still stink for days. Therefore, one can only imagine what sort of odors emanated from the person of Jonah after swimming for three days in the gastrointestinal acids, digestive juices, and undigested remnants of yesterday's lunch floating around in the giant belly of a great fish.

Is Such Possible?

Many people hear this and think this is simply not possible. Many people read the book of Jonah and conclude that this is nothing but pure myth. However, the apostle Peter boldly declares,

“For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty.”

2 Peter 1:16 (ESV)

In speaking to the Pharisees about “*the sign of the prophet Jonah,*” ***Jesus is arguing that the events of Jonah's life are real and true events.*** So are such things possible?

In March of 2019, wildlife photographer, Rainer Schimpf, in South Africa was filming a sardine run when he was caught up in the mouth of the mouth of a whale, and his team captured the moment in a photograph.¹⁰

⁹ Jonah 3:4.

¹⁰ Source: <https://www.smalljoys.tv/whale-spit-him-out/> accessed 29 March 2024.

In June of 2021, the Cape Cod Times reported about lobster fisherman, Michael Packard, diving for lobster when he was scooped up into the mouth of a juvenile humpback whale.¹¹ He was completely inside its mouth in total darkness. He was laden with scuba gear and he and his tanks became stuck in the whale's throat. Packard reported the young whale didn't like the surprise and after about 30 or 40 seconds he began shaking his head from side to side and soon Packard saw daylight as the whale opened his mouth and he went flying out of the mouth and back into the ocean.

Possible to be Swallowed by a Whale?

It appears to be true that a human is too big to be swallowed by humpback whales. However, a man will easily fit down the mouth of a sperm whale. The biblical text does not say that Jonah was swallowed by a whale, but rather by "*a large fish.*"

Possible to be Swallowed by Whale Shark

If that "large fish" happened to be a 30 foot long whale shark, then a human could easily be swallowed by this largest of all fish. In fact, it appears from a photo¹² there's even room for two or more inside the mouth and stomach of the largest of the Great fish of the seas.

Yes, Such Things Are Possible

Thus, *such things are possible*. And we know that "*with God all things are possible*" (Mt 19:26). Jesus is here arguing that *the events that unfolded in Jonah's life were true and factual and that they will be similar to the events that will truly unfold in his own life*. Just as Jonah was a sign to the people of Nineveh, so Jesus will be a sign to the people of Israel.

Matthew 12:40 (ESV) 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.

Jesus is here predicting his death for the first time in Matthew's gospel. He will do so three more times before he is crucified.¹³ Jesus is quoting Jonah 1:17, but he is doing so in order to point forward in time to predict his own death and resurrection. Just as Jonah was three days in the belly of the fish, so Jesus will be three days in the "*heart of the earth,*" which refers to him being in the 'belly of death.'

We can't see this in English, but Jesus is rhyming here. The Greek word for "belly" (*κοιλία koilia*) rhymes with the Greek word for "heart" (*καρδιά kardia*).¹⁴ Jesus is saying,

¹¹ Source: <https://www.capecodtimes.com/story/news/2021/06/11/humpback-whale-catches-michael-packard-lobster-driver-mouth-provincetown-cape-cod/7653838002/> accessed 29 March 2024.

¹² Source: <https://people.com/pets/photos-whale-shark-almost-swallowing-two-divers/> accessed 29 March 2024.

¹³ Matthew 16:21; 17:22-23; 20:17-19.

¹⁴ James Parks, *Wordplay in the Bible* (Bellingham, WA: Faithlife, 2021), Mt 12:40.

Just as Jonah in the *koilia* of the fish,
was three days and three nights,
so the Son of Man in the *kardia* of the earth,
will be three days and three nights.

This is the sign of Jonah and it will be the sign of Jesus. Jonah was as good as dead for three days, and then on the third day he was delivered back to life. So also will Jesus be dead for three days and then on the third day he will be delivered back to life. This is the sign that Jesus will give to the scribes and Pharisees *if they have eyes to see*. Jesus is inviting them to keep their eyes on him and see if he is able to pull off this sign, then that would be irrefutable confirmation that he had come from God.

Did he do it? Was he able to pull it off?

Those who knew him best and walked with him say he did it. Those who were closest to him and were *"eyewitnesses of his majesty"* say he did it. It is the testimony of his family and his disciples that he did it. In fact, these folks were willing to die proclaiming that he truly was raised from the dead. It has been the testimony of his people from that day down to this day, that, YES, Jesus was resurrected from the dead on the third day after his crucifixion. This is what we are here celebrating today. This is in fact what we celebrate every Sunday, because it was on a Sunday, the first day of the Jewish week, that Jesus rose from the dead.

Objection: Three Days AND Three Nights

There are many who object at this point. They would argue saying, "Todd, you are a biblical literalist, right?" I would respond saying, "Yes, I believe that where the Bible intends to taken literal, there we must take it literally." "Well then," goes the argument, "Jesus here says that he will be *"three days and three nights in the heart of the earth."* If he was crucified on Friday and resurrected on Sunday morning, then that is three days and **two** nights. This 'sign' of Jesus is a problem. Jesus is a liar and not the son of God." I would then respond saying, "Jesus does not here intend to be taken literally, *regarding the number of nights, but only regarding the number of days.*"

The Timeline of the Crucifixion

First, we must ask the question, Is it correct to assume that Jesus was crucified on Friday, and then was resurrected on Sunday morning.

Day 1: Jesus was crucified on Friday.

Luke 23:50, 52-54 (ESV) ⁵⁰ Now there was a man named Joseph, from the Jewish town of Arimathea. ⁵² This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. ⁵³ Then he took it down and wrapped it in a linen shroud and laid him in a tomb cut in stone,

where no one had ever yet been laid. ⁵⁴ It was the day of Preparation, and the Sabbath was beginning.

The "day of preparation" is Friday, the day before the Sabbath¹⁵, which is Saturday and "was beginning." Friday was the "day of preparation," because on that day people were to prepare for the Sabbath, since no work, including no cooking, could be done on the Sabbath. Thus, yes, Jesus was crucified on Friday, the day before the Sabbath.

Day 2: Jesus was dead in the tomb on Saturday.

Luke 23:55-56 (ESV) ⁵⁵ The women who had come with him from Galilee followed and saw the tomb and how his body was laid. ⁵⁶ Then they returned and prepared spices and ointments. On the Sabbath they rested according to the commandment.

Yes, Jesus' body remained in the tomb all day on the Sabbath day, which is Saturday.

Day 3: Jesus was resurrected on Sunday morning.

Luke 24:1-3 (ESV) ¹ But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they went to the tomb, taking the spices they had prepared. ² And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb, ³ but when they went in they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus.

The first day of the week is Sunday. Therefore, yes, Jesus was resurrected on Sunday morning.

Thus, if this is the correct timeline, and it is, then this makes three days (Friday, Saturday, Sunday), but only *two nights* (Friday night and Saturday night). But Jesus said that he'd be in the belly of death "*three days and three nights*" (Mt 12:40), so there's a problem here.

There is a problem here, but it is not with Jesus, but rather with us. The problem is not inaccuracy with the words of Jesus, but rather inaccuracy with biblical interpretation of us. The problem, in this instance, is 20th century English speakers failing to think and interpret like first century Hebrew speakers.

Three Reasons Not to Take "Three Nights" Literally

Let me offer three reasons to conclude that Jesus intends only to communicate the number of days, not nights.

1) Hebrew Idioms Are Not to be Taken Literally

¹⁵ Mark 15:42.

First, this way of talking is a **Hebrew idiom that means three days, or any part of three separate days**. An idiom is a phrase whose meaning is different from the literal meaning of the individual words that comprises it.

- We use idioms in English, such as, "it's raining cats and dogs," "under the weather," "spill the beans," "killing time," "break a leg," "kick the bucket," "thrown in the towel," "hit the ceiling," "sitting on the fence," etc.
- Jesus used idioms.
 - "***I will give you keys to the kingdom...***" (Mt 16:19). This is an idiom that means, "to have authority over and access to." We do not call Jesus a liar because he did not literally hand over a set of physical keys.
 - "***In order to be my disciple you must hate your father and mother...***" (Lk 14:26). This is an idiom that means "to love less." He is not here commanding actual hatred of mother and father. We know this for he commands us to love even our enemies¹⁶ and elsewhere affirms the fifth commandment, "to honor father and mother."¹⁷
 - Jesus says about Herod, "***Go tell that fox...***" (Lk 13:32). That is an idiom for a sly person. No one condemns Jesus for believing that Herod was literally a fox.
- This phrase, "***three days and three nights,***" is an idiom that means a total of three days and is not intended to be understood as literally giving the number of nights. *Jews reckoned time inclusively*, meaning that when counting days they always started with the day they were currently on, no matter the time of day, even if it was close to the end of the day.¹⁸

In the Talmud,¹⁹ "The rabbis said, 'A day and a night make an 'Onah and a part of an 'Onah is as the whole;' and again, 'The part of a day is as the whole day.' Thus we have Friday, Saturday, Sunday, three days; it does not matter that neither the Friday nor the Sunday was complete."²⁰

- **Summary:** the phrase, "three days and three nights," is an idiomatic phrase that *emphatically* states the number of days and is not intended to say anything about the number of nights. Jesus is not a liar or a deceiver here (in Mt 12:40) any more than he is a liar or a deceiver for calling Herod a "fox." "Thus according to Jewish tradition, 'three days and three nights' need mean no more than 'three days' or the combination of any part of three separate days."²¹

¹⁶ Matthew 5:43-44.

¹⁷ See Matthew 15:3-6.

¹⁸ See the parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard where those who worked only one hour were paid a full day's wage along with those who worked twelve hours (Matthew 20:1-16).

¹⁹ Rabbinic commentary explaining the Law of God.

²⁰ Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press, 1992), 326, n. 101.

²¹ D. A. Carson, "Matthew," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 296.

2) Neither the Disciples Nor Early Church Took 'Three Nights' Literally

The second reason not to take the number of nights literally is because **neither the disciples nor the early church did so**.

- The disciples had no problem with this kind of language. When Jesus rose from the dead on Sunday morning and appeared to the disciples later that evening²² none of them said to him, "Jesus, it's truly great to see you, but don't you know that it is just now the third night since your death. Have you forgotten what you said to the scribes and Pharisee about the sign of Jonah? It seems you're a little too anxious and got up too early! Now you've ruined everything!" The disciples did not take Jesus' statement literally (at least we are nowhere told that they did).
- The early church saw no problem with this way of speaking either. **Jerome** (A.D. 347-420), in A.D. 398 wrote a commentary on the Gospel of Matthew and it he wrote,
...by using a synecdoche (συνεκδοχικῶς), the whole can be understood from the part. It is not that the Lord spent the whole of three days and three nights in the nether world. Rather, the three days and three nights refer to part of the day of preparation, part of the Lord's day, and the whole of the Sabbath day.²³
- **Summary**. If neither the disciples nor the early church stumbled over this way talking about the number of days until his resurrection, then neither should we.

3) Pharisees Did Not Take 'Three Nights' Literally

The third reason not to take the number of nights literally is because **Jesus' enemies did not take them literally**. The scribes and Pharisees who heard this commandment did not believe that Jesus meant three literal nights, but rather they understood him to mean three days.

- The Pharisees went to Pilate *after the first night*, on the second day (i.e. on the Sabbath), not after the second night, to request a guard be set at Jesus' tomb, for they understood that Sunday morning was the third day.

Matthew 27:62-64 (ESV) ⁶² The next day, that is, after the day of Preparation²⁴, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered before Pilate ⁶³ and said, "Sir, we remember how that impostor said, while he was still alive, 'After three days I will rise.' ⁶⁴ Therefore order the tomb to be made secure until the third day, lest his disciples go and steal him away and tell the people, 'He has risen from the dead,' and the last fraud will be worse than the first."

- If the Pharisees had understood Jesus' claim to raise "after three days and three nights" to be taken literally, then given that Jesus was crucified on the day of Preparation for the Sabbath, which is Friday, then the third night after Friday night

²² Luke 24:36-43.

²³ Jerome, *Commentary on Matthew*, ed. Thomas P. Halton, trans. Thomas P. Scheck, vol. 117, The Fathers of the Church (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2008), 147.

²⁴ Since Friday is the day of Preparation, this means that they went to Pilate on the Sabbath day, which is Saturday.

would have been Monday morning rather than Sunday morning, but the Pharisees expected something to happen on Sunday morning.

- The Pharisees never used the fact that Jesus was only in the tomb two nights as grounds for why to disbelieve the resurrection. They perpetuated the story that Jesus' disciples stole his body, but had there been any value in pointing out that Jesus failed to be in the tomb literally three nights, then they certainly would have used that against Jesus. But they did not. They did not because they did not take Jesus' claim in Mt 12:40 as describing the number of *nights* he would be in the tomb, but rather the number of days.
- **Summary:** If Jesus' enemies did not take literally his claim of being in the grave three nights, then why should we? We should not.

Summary: The phrase "three days and three nights" is a Hebrew idiom, which is not to be taken literally regarding the number of nights, but rather is to be understood as saying only that Jesus would be resurrected at some time on the third day. Since neither the disciples, nor the early church, nor Jesus' enemies understood "three nights" in the tomb literally, then neither should we. We should accept that Jesus literally rose from the tomb on the third day in accordance with the Scripture.

Jonah literally was a prophet. He tried to run away from God and he literally ended up spending three days in the stinky stomach of a large fish. He then literally went to Nineveh and preached to them to repent of their sins and believe in the God of Israel. Jonah and his near death experience and deliverance thereafter, was a sign so real to the Ninevites that they repented, turned to God in faith, and they were spared from judgment.

And this is what the scribes and Pharisees ought to have done as well, but they didn't thus they are running the risk of being condemned in the judgement.

The Reality of Judgment

There is a literal judgment.

Matthew 12:41-42 (ESV) ⁴¹ "The men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah... ⁴² The queen of the South will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon..."

Jesus believes in a literal judgment that will involve the resurrection of all people. Some, like the men of Nineveh and the queen of the South, will be resurrected unto eternal life, because they repented of their sins and believed in God. However, others, like the scribes and Pharisees, will be resurrected at the last judgment only to be condemned for all eternity.

They will be condemned because they have rejected God's greatest messenger, his only Son and Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth. The men of Nineveh will be spared in the day of judgment for they believed the message of Jonah. The queen of the South will be spared on the day of judgment because she believed the wisdom of Solomon. Yet, something greater than both Jonah and Solomon has come, but the Pharisees are rejecting this great messenger.

The Greatness of Jesus

Jesus is literally the greatest savior.

Matthew 12:41-42 (ESV) ⁴¹ "The men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and **behold, something greater than Jonah is here.** ⁴² The queen of the South will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and **behold, something greater than Solomon is here.**"

Jesus is greater than both Jonah and Solomon. God did great things through Jonah and Solomon. Through Jonah God saved the city of Nineveh; the majority of one hundred and twenty thousand people were saved through the preaching of Jonah. That's great. Through Solomon God gave the people of Israel unprecedented peace and built the Temple. That's great. But Jesus is greater than Jonah or Solomon or Abraham or David.

Conclusion

Jesus is greater than them all, because *only Jesus was resurrected from the dead on the third day*, just as he predicted. Jesus gave the sign that he promised. Just as Jonah was entombed in the belly of a fish for three days, so Jesus was entombed in the rock for three days. Just as God spoke to the fish to spit out Jonah, so God spoke to the stone to roll back so all the ladies could see that Jesus was alive.

God has spoken to this world through his Son in a way that he has never before spoken through anyone else. Anyone who ignores what God has said to us through Jesus will face a judgment of eternal condemnation. However, anyone who hears and believes what God has spoken through Jesus will, at the judgment, find heaven opened to him, hearing these words, Enter into the eternal joy of your Master.²⁵

The gates of heaven swing upon the hinges of seeing Jesus as the greatest treasure of all. Is he your deepest delight? If not, then repent and make it right. Is he, in your eyes, the most worthy of all things? If not, then surrender now and make him King of your life.

²⁵ Matthew 25:21, 46.

The promise of God is this,

Romans 10:9-13 (ESV) ... if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰ For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.

¹¹ For the Scripture says, "Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame."

¹³ For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

Members of our prayer team are waiting to pray with you.

Discussion Questions

1. What is the sign of Jonah?
2. Was Jonah really in the belly of the great fish?
3. Was Jesus really in the "heart of the earth?"
4. Was he there "three days and three nights?"
5. What is the "heart of the earth?"
6. Will there really be a judgment?
7. Are the scribes and Pharisees in danger of eternal condemnation because they hate Jesus?
8. Who are the "men of Nineveh" and the "queen of the South?"
9. Will there really be a "rising up?"
10. Is Jesus claiming to be greater than Jonah and Solomon?
11. How is Jesus greater than Jonah and Solomon?