Study of Jonah - Part 3

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[0:00] Seeking the Lord's blessing, we'll turn to the second part of scripture. We read the gospel according to Matthew and chapter 12.

Reading again at verse 38. Matthew 12 verse 38. Then certain of the scribes and of the Pharisees answered, saying, Master, we would see a sign from thee.
But he answered and said unto them, An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign. And there shall no sign be given to it but the sign of the prophet Jonah.
For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the whale's belly, so shall the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. And especially those words of verse 40.
For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the whale's belly, so shall the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.
[1:15] now we've been looking at the life and experience of Jonah as we have it recorded for us by himself in the Old Testament and it's recorded in the book that bears his own name and we followed him in his experience when he was called by God to preach the gospel to the Ninevites and we saw how he ran from that commandment he ran away from the presence of the Lord or he ran away from the duty which God required of him and went or sought to go as far west as possible when God had told him to go east and we've noticed how God brought him into three bellies before he was returned into the useful service of God he was first in the belly of the ship and then in the belly of the sea and then in the belly of the whale now we saw him first in the belly of the ship it's called here just the it's called the inside of the ship or the sides of the ship the word means flank or interior parts and it's translated in the Greek as belly so his first belly is the belly of the ship and there Jonah is asleep and he's asleep because he is himself shattered with the exhaustion of a man who is disobeying God and knows that he is disobeying God and he falls asleep in the ship in that way and he carries all the marks of a disobedient man first of all he tries to hide his identity and we saw that he never once tells them who he is in the midst of the storm they have to ask him he has ceased to be a witness for his Lord because he has lost his boldness because he is disobedient and then again he wants to be on his own and very often a disobedient Christian is just like that too he finds it much easier to withdraw to be separate to be isolated than to be in the company of those who may be detect or who may be know that he is not obedient and then again it seems that Jonah has lost his prayer and in the midst of the storm when everyone else is calling upon their gods the heathen have to urge this man of God to pray and that is a sad thing whenever the world has to move the Christian to pray or to call upon his God but Jonah is in a kind of sloth in a kind of stupor spiritually because he is going headlong against what the Lord required him to do and we saw whenever this kind of situation comes into a person's life then God begins the process of discipline and it must necessarily be so and God sends the wind that is the means that he uses and he brings a ferocious storm upon the sea and then when they cast lots to find out who's responsible it falls to Jonah and Jonah knows that God has found him out that God if you like has chased him even onto the sea

God knows where he is God knows his heart and God tells Jonah that if he is cast overboard the sailors will have peace and so the sailors against their own desire take Jonah and cast him into the sea and we notice that Jonah does this although he does it in obedience he does it in a kind of despair I think we could say almost a kind of despair he does it to someone who feels that he's maybe forfeited God's blessing someone who's done wrong and who deserves to be punished and who doesn't really deserve to be alive it's as though he's praying like Elijah prayed take away my life for why should I live cast me into the sea and that puts Jonah into the second belly and he calls it himself here in chapter 2 the belly of the sea the belly of hell he calls it or the belly of the grave but it's referring to the sea in which he sank that's the second belly now as he's sinking and as he

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begins to drown he realizes or he fears that he may be cast out of God's presence altogether and that's a remarkable thing because in his prayer he says this
I said I am cast out of thy sight chapter 2 verse 4 and that's what he said when he was beginning to sink he felt as though God had rejected him altogether now friends that wasn't true and God never lets his own people go entirely to despair in that kind of way and I think we closed by saying last time that as he sank in the water so his hope began to rise or so his faith began to rise he did something there that he wasn't doing in the boat he prayed he prayed and when God's dealing with us like that in a way of discipline gradually a prayer begins to emerge a true prayer and a proper prayer and so we're told that I remembered the Lord chapter 2 verse 7 when he sank I remembered the Lord what does that mean well I think it means that he remembered who God was and what kind of God he was dealing with he wasn't dealing with a God who would cast him off if he really looked to him isn't it by the way a strange thing here's the man who wanted to get out of God's presence and when the time comes when he fears that it's going to happen it's the last thing he wants I'm cast out of thy sight he says that's the child of God maybe sometimes God expects you to do a thing that's very very difficult and you try and run away from it and you wish you didn't have to do that or that obedience didn't cost you so much or whatever but then when you're met with a fearful alternative that maybe God would withdraw from you altogether well the true child of God can't bear that it's not just that you can't bear being lost but that you can't actually live without God and that's a mark of a child of God that he can't live without God you cannot in your innermost soul bear the thought of God being separate from you you being out of his presence and that's a mark of a true Christian that you could never dream of living really apart from this God the God and Father of your Lord Jesus Christ so he begins to pray to the God who has mercy to the God of loving kindness to the God who deals with us not as we deserve but who is plenteous in mercy and plenteous in redemption and he calls upon that God he confesses his sin perhaps he hasn't wanted to come face to face with it even on the boat he doesn't want to come face to face with it perhaps when he's initially thrown overboard he doesn't but now when he fears death and now when he's about to stand before the judgment seat of God he pours out his heart before
God yes he says I did wrong and he confesses his sin and he calls upon God as his savior and God answers his prayer in a remarkable way because we read that the Lord prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah so Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights in other words Jonah entering the whale was an answer to his prayer now that may not be the way you usually think of it but you read Jonah chapter 2 a couple of times and you'll see that that's exactly what it was that entering the whale in a strange way was an answer to his prayer now it's the last thing he expected I'm sure he hoped that God would save his soul in the sense that when he died even by drowning that God would bring him into glory but as Jonah sinking in the sea and as he describes himself in chapter 2 even the weeds going around his head he must have become conscious of a large and fearful shadow and he must have become conscious of the yawning mouth of a huge sea creature and he must equally have been conscious of entering into the mouth of that creature and even passing down into its throat and being pushed by the muscle of the throat of the throat of the throat of that creature right down into the intestine so that Jonah finds himself in the most remarkable position he finds himself in the belly of a whale and he's there by
God's appointment God prepared the fish God authorized the fish to open its mouth and God saw to it that Jonah was swallowed by the whale now it's not called a whale in Jonah you'll notice it's called a great fish it's called a whale in Matthew it's Christ himself who calls it that that Jonah he says was three days and three nights in the whale's belly but the actual Greek word there doesn't mean specifically whale it just means a large sea creature of any kind now that may seem irrelevant but I think it's quite important and we'll come to that a little later on the translators here have given it to us as a whale and there's all kinds of speculation as to what kind of whale or what kind of sea creature this was that swallowed Jonah now it is possible that it may be a whale that we still know and that is still extant in this world whales are remarkable creatures and as most people think there's nothing much to a whale really but it's like everything else in God's created world you get into it and it's much more interesting than meets the eye everything God made shows his own manifoldness his variety and what he is as God and the whale is like that there are 77 different species even in the world just now the largest of them is known as the blue whale now even that whale itself is interesting because its mouth can hold a large size family car when it's resting but when it is in the process of eating its throat is arranged in such a way that it opens to five times its normal size so that a whale eating can actually carry the equivalent of five family cars in its mouth and it weighs as

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much as well there are several small children here tonight a blue whale a very large blue whale weighs about the same as 6,000 children and you can imagine the weight of that they are often over a hundred feet long and a blue whale that was killed in 1947 had a heart that weighed believe it or not over four tons and its tongue also weighed over four tons and these are some of the most remarkable creatures that the
[12:45] Lord himself made fowl of the air and fish of the sea and all that passed through the same how excellent in all the earth Lord our Lord is thy name it is into the mouth and into the throat and the intestines of some kind of creature like that that Jonah passes and he finds himself now personally I don't think this whale was one of the ones that are extant now I'll come to that in a moment by the way it is not actually unusual to find bodies of people whole inside whales quite often I shouldn't say quite often but certainly not unusually sometimes a whale has been opened and the bodies or the carcass of large objects sometimes men are found intact inside them and it's apparently pretty well reported that off the Falkland Islands on one occasion hours after a man was swept overboard that a man was drawn unconscious from the inside of a whale whether that's true or not I'm not able to say but certainly whole bodies have been found and these bodies are bleached white because of the gastric juices of the whale and it may be possible that Jonah himself was like that with his skin virtually bleached because of where he had been that might become interesting actually in a moment now Jonah was conscious inside this whale at least for a time and we know that because the word of God tells us that Jonah prayed unto the Lord his God out of the fish's belly not before he entered it not after he had come out of it but when he was inside the fish's belly he prayed to the Lord imagine that the scriptures tell us to pray everywhere well this is a remarkable place to pray in cocooned squeezed inside the intestine of a whale

Jonah calls upon the name of his God he calls upon the name of his God now there are two ways in which I want to look with you at Jonah inside this whale first of all more briefly Jonah's own experience what did it mean to him what did being inside the whale's belly signify for Jonah and then secondly and perhaps in a little more detail why does Christ connect this with his own experience because he says that just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the whale so he would be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth what's the connection is it just simply three three and three three or is there something more to it is there something more to it than the mere fact that there is three days and three nights in the one and there is three days and three nights in the other well we'll see that when we come to it let's look first of all at Jonah's experience inside the whale strangely enough
Jonah begins to rest in his God now isn't that remarkable this is where his faith really rises and he lays hold upon his God and you see that in the second chapter of the book of Jonah because when he prays to his God he says this I said this is part of the prayer I said when I was in the sea I am cast out of thy sight no I will look again towards thy holy temple isn't that remarkable he knows he's inside the whale for a purpose he's not a dead man he's not drowned he knows he's there for a reason yet again he says I will look towards thy holy temple and he says this too I went down to the bottoms of the mountains yet though has brought up my life from corruption oh Lord my God he looks upon himself as someone who's been liberated when he's inside the belly of the whale and right at the end of the prayer he gives thanks to God I will sacrifice with the voice of thanksgiving salvation is off the Lord and then the Lord
God spoke to the fish and it vomited Jonah out on the dry land so Jonah's exercising faith inside the belly of the whale why what does Jonah learn well he's learned what we all learn when God disciplines or chastises us first of all we learn that God is gracious and discipline teaches us that God never deals with us as we deserve not as we sinned Jonah finds himself alive and what's more he saved not only is still alive he saved God didn't reject him God didn't turn his back on him because he had fled in disobedience but God in his mercy and in his loving kindness took him back and that's something for Jonah to be grateful for that he's alive knowing that God has a purpose for him yes even if he's still in the most unspeakable inhospitable place in the world still he's alive and he knows that God has a reason for him being alive and he knows that God has a purpose for him and that God loves him and that has he had mercy upon him and that's a great thing friends sometimes God comes upon you maybe with a heavy hand and you find things have become really difficult for you in one way or another and first of all maybe you oppose it or you kick against it but when you taste the love of God in it and when you recognize the loving kindness of God in it and when you recognize that the hand that's smiting you is not the hand of an enemy but the hand of

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your father who loves you then that makes a difference to the thing and you find that you're able to bear it yes you can find that you can even rejoice in it do you remember Paul when he had the thorn in the flesh he beseeched God three times that God would remove the thing that he would take away the pain until he discovered that it was for his good it was for his mercy and then he learned to rejoice in the thing he learned to rejoice in it and he gloried in his weakness because he realized it was for a good and when you know that God is at work in any situation you can bear with it didn't Micah say that the spiritual prophet he says I will bear the indignation of the Lord because he saw where it was going and he saw where it was heading and that is why in the belly of the Lord Jonah is able to rest in God is it not better to be saved in a whale's belly than to be lost in a king's palace is it not better and when you have the love of God in your heart and the knowledge that God is with you and that your soul is saved in many respects it doesn't matter your condition and it doesn't matter your providence when these things burn in your soul and that's who they were in the heart of Jonah but then again in the belly of the whale he saw this he saw the evil of sin and his own foolishness in disobey friends as Jeremiah says it is an evil and bitter thing to sin against God an easy route and if we don't hear God's gentle word calling us back then we'll feel his rod when it lies on our back and God chastises you in much the same way as you as a father would chastise your children or you as a mother gently first and more firmly later the Lord spoke to Jonah I'm sure many times on his 60 mile trek to Joppa spoke to his conscience spoke to his heart spoke to him before he slept in the boat but no the rod of God was heavy upon his back and when Jonah comes inside the whale he knows that it is a terrible thing to be sinning against the Lord he knows it is a terrible thing and it's good for us to learn that too you know it's no good thing if you're in disobedience and you're getting off with it and I could be speaking to someone who has precisely that situation tonight and maybe you feel a kind of security in it for all I know maybe you think yes I can get off with this and maybe it's not affecting my spiritual life too much or whatever well that's no good thing for a start when God deals with you he will deal with you if you've been persisting in disobedience for some time God has whispered to you maybe God has shouted to you but when God takes out the rod you wish that you had listened to the whisper or to the shout and one way or another we will learn that it would be better if we just did what the Lord asks and you can be a great theologian and you can just disobey God I'm sure Jonah knew his scripture sins I doubt but when God said go east he went west and that brought the rod upon his back it is not what we know but what we do that determines how God deals with us and so the chastisement lasts a bit longer even after he confesses his sin still it goes on because

[22:23] God has a lesson for him to learn and he learns that lesson and when Jonah learns that lesson God says to the fish let him go and then we're told that the fish vomited out Jonah on dry land and God's processes of discipline with you and with me are just like that he will bring us to a place where we know where and what we have done and he'll bring us to that place where we've learned it well and then he will let us go so that is Jonah inside the belly now that sorted out one thing I suppose with respect to Jonah but it didn't sort out another see it's one thing to learn to obey it's another to obey in the right spirit the world says it isn't what you do it's the way that you do it well that's important in the Christian life too see sometimes if we go wrong God deals with us going wrong first and then maybe later he deals with why and how Jonah's been put right in one way but not in another he's now ready to go to but he's still not happy going and so God is going to deal with that but we'll look at look at that a little later on now let's turn secondly to what I want to look at in a little more detail with you and that's how the Lord refers to this in Matthew chapter 12 and he says this in verse 39 an evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign and there shall no sign be given to it but the sign of the prophet

Jonah now the Lord here is speaking to the Pharisees and the constant demand was the same by whose authority are you speaking or are you performing these miracles or whatever or are you speaking these words give us a miracle show us a sign lay before us one thing that we can certainly grasp at as being a sure miraculous proof that you are who you say you are and that you are a man sent from God and the Lord turns to that unbelief he feeds faith he denies unbelief he turns to that unbelief and he says no sign shall be given to you but the sign of the prophet Jonah now if you read Mark's gospel that's all it says no sign shall be given to you except the sign of the prophet Jonah and I suppose you would ask the question well what sign what sign did Jonah give to the Ninevites we never read of Jonah giving a sign what is the sign of Jonah well if you go to look the words are put differently the words are like this Christ says this as Jonah was a sign to the Ninevites so the

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son of man shall be a sign to this generation now that helps us because the sign of Jonah is himself he is the sign when he appears in Nineveh preaching repentance and we believe faith too when he appears in Nineveh preaching that he is a sign himself a sign how well it's Matthew that tells us that and see all these things tell us compare scripture when you go to Matthew he gives us the final piece he says this in verse 40 as Jonah was three days and three nights in the whale's belly so shall the son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth now what that means is this Jonah was a sign to the people because he was in the whale's belly in other words it's the only way we can understand it Jonah presented himself to the Ninevites as a man who had been in the belly of a whale he appeared before them like that and told them that he was that that this is who he was that God had given him a commission that this is how he had responded to it that he found himself in the belly of the sea and in the belly of the whale and that he came to them as a man who had come from the belly of the sea monster that is how Jonah presented himself and the Ninevites knew it they knew it now it's quite possible that news of what had happened to Jonah went before him I suppose we wonder where the fish vomited him out now I would reckon that the fish vomited the man out where he had begun if he begun in Joppa then that he was vomited back out there because God usually takes a man back to where he was before he went wrong and I'm quite sure when the fish would have vomited him out that there would have been witnesses around to see it or that people who would have gone down to see the sight of a whale we're told remember that the whale vomited him out on dry land so the whale came near enough to vomit out Jonah probably in the presence of one or two witnesses people who saw and knew him as a man who had come forth from inside a whale I mentioned the skin earlier who knows but that even the skin God could have preserved the skin too I wouldn't state that it had been changed but maybe he forever in his body bore the marks of having been in the belly of the whale even as Christ bore the marks of being in the belly of the earth maybe Jonah bore the marks of being in the belly of the whale we'll come to that again a little later on but he presented himself to the Ninevites I am the man now you can imagine that sometimes people tell you a story about a person and maybe he had quite remarkable experiences and then maybe the man himself comes along and he tells it like it is he can tell it as it was at the time and how he felt and so on well that was Jonah he appeared in Nineveh as the man from the belly of the whale now how does that connect with Christ well friends there is a glorious link here between the two

Jonah in the belly of the whale and Christ in the heart of the earth first of all we can say this that both of them entered the belly of death the belly of death now take first Jonah how did he enter the belly of death was this not a fish and was he not alive in it well yes but the word in Matthew means a large sea creature and you remember that that large sea creature is seen in the context of a storm God prepared this fish in the midst of a stormy sea in order to swallow up Jonah now the sea creature has a particular significance in the Old Testament you'll notice here and again Leviathan or Rahab these are large sea creatures possibly whales or some kind of whales that may have been around at that time and are now extinct and very often in the scriptures

God is spoken of as coming into the waters and crushing the head of the Leviathan or destroying Rahab now in the Old Testament a stormy sea is a symbol of chaos and it's a symbol of the enemies of God restless against himself Psalm 45 Psalm 46 sorry Psalm 124 and so many other passages it is a restless enmity against God and the sea creature describes the power of evil that is at the heart of that troubled sea Leviathan represents the devil himself and the crushing of Leviathan or the crushing of Rahab represents the crushing or the destruction of the power of evil no I would like in a way to enter a lot more fully into that and I did some time ago but in the context of this I can't really afford to do that but the crushing of the crushing of the crushing of the crushing of the power of evil God overruling the Leviathan God breaking Rahab in pieces now notice what's happening here Jonah is cast into the troubled sea and along comes this large sea creature can we call it a Leviathan can we call it Rahab and this creature swallows Jonah so that Jonah is caught into the belly of darkness and can we say that the prophet of God is swallowed by the representative of the power of the power of the power of the power of the power of the power of evil so that he is inside the belly so that the large enmity of against God the power of evil the power of darkness swallows up the prophet of God so that he is inside the belly how fitting a temp type or an emblem of what was to happen to Christ himself was he not swallowed by death was he not devoured by it are we not told that Christ was under the power of death for three days even while he was there after the cross when he said it is finished when he was victorious still he had to go into the heart of the ground he had to go into the belly of the ground because he was continuing under

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the power of death for three days although his spirit was rejoicing at rest with God even as Noah even as Jonah was at rest with God inside the whale still he was under the power of death under its power Christ was swallowed Psalm 22 the bulls of Bashan surround me the lion devouring I am brought he says to the dust of death that is Christ upon the cross he is swallowed and he is devoured so they both enter the belly of death and then again there's this they are both resurrected if there's one place from which a man shouldn't return alive after three days it's the inside of a whale nobody looked for him to return but Jonah returned almost from the dead after three days when there should be death and decay Jonah is kept in the intestine of the whale by God and we're told that God spoke to the fish and that of course means that God just moved the fish [33:35] God's in control of fowl of the air and fish of the sea every single providential movement is in his control God ordered this fish to vomit out what was inside and Jonah was vomited out the Lord spake to the fish and it vomited out Jonah upon the dry land God caused it God did it and when this man appears cast onto the dry land he's like a man back from the dead a man who should have been dead a man who in an emblem was dead but now he's alive he's alive as a prophet he's alive as an ambassador of God and he's alive to take the word of salvation to the Ninevites who are lost without hope and without God in the world and in the same way Christ is resurrected too when a man was crucified and when Christ was crucified and when he was suspended there for hours as he was and when they plunged the spear into his side and when they took him as a dead man battered and bruised long before his crucifixion and when they took him and laid him inside the tomb and rolled the stone upon him it was as though that man should never have reappeared again he was dead it was as though he were finished done and gone who could expect the stone to be rolled who could think that life would infuse itself into that body and that this man would rise as the God man the resurrected man Christ Jesus but that is exactly what he did God raised him from the dead why because it was not possible that death should hold him yes it was right that death should take a grip of him yes it was right that he should be swallowed but it was not possible for death to hold him because he was greater than death and he was greater than the devourer and he swallowed the sting and he destroyed the devil therefore he must be vomited out of the tomb in the same way as Jonah must be vomited out of the belly of the whale yes friend Christ returned from the land of the dead he returned from the land of the dead and you'll notice that all this is God's command it was God who commanded Jonah to be swallowed because we'll read that God prepared the fish it was God who commanded the fish to let him go because God spoke to it and it vomited him out and in the same way it was God who commanded death to swallow Christ yes it was it was a just thing that he be swallowed it wasn't an accident Christ entered into the mouth of the lion by the appointment of God by the appointment of God yes swallow him yes devour him as the sin bearer and by the same token it was but Christ at God's command that Christ was yielded up from the tomb alive because God raised him from the dead even as he died in obedience to God so he was raised in that way God empowered him and God raised him it is all of God and then again there's this not only did both enter the belly of death and not only were both kind of resurrected out of it but it's also true that both were resurrected to bring a message of life to the lost 40 days Nineveh got 40 years Jerusalem got 40 years and when it didn't repent the armies of Rome under Titus destroyed Jerusalem a time of probation 40 years and it was destroyed AD 70 with Jonah 40 days probation for Nineveh but they repented and there is the remarkable thing

they repented at the preaching of Jonah and they resisted the preaching of our Lord Jesus Christ and you as well as I are still on probation yes my friend you are Christ was raised from the tomb to give a message of life to you and he's giving you that tonight the message of the gospel is a message of life come here and your soul shall live taste and see that God is good repent and believe the gospel believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved now there's of course differences between the two one difference is that Jonah ended up where he was because of his disobedience whereas Christ ended up where he was because of his obedience but that doesn't change this thrust that the prophet of God dies and is entombed and is resurrected to bring life to the lost that is the point of the comparison and that makes it a glorious comparison comparison and you look at it in that way because what Christ says is this no sign shall be given to you but the sign of the prophet Jonah for as Jonah was three days and three nights in the whale's belly so shall the son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the heart of the earth now in Luke he says Jonah was a sign to Nineveh they took him and they heard his message not just because of the word but because of the sign accompanying it that he had come to them from the belly of a whale

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and Christ says if they believed a lesser miracle and if they believed a lesser prophet from a lesser miracle how much more you should believe a greater prophet on the basis of a greater miracle because I he says did not come to you from the belly of a whale because wonderful as that is it is not all together beyond the realms of the possible but I come to you from a more gloomy dark belly than that from the belly of the earth I came from the depths from the grave
I came from there and how much more you should hear me no wonder that he says the men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation and shall condemn it because they repented at the preaching of Jonah and behold a greater than Jonah is here a man came in here and told you that he had come from the belly of a whale and told you that he had come from the dead and told you that he had been dead and urged you to believe would you believe the rich man said send Lazarus back to my brothers and tell them that they might believe God said they have Moses and the prophets if they won't hear him and then neither will they hear if a man rose from the dead you ask for a sign you ask me from us for a sign you're asking God for a sign well I've got my sign and you've got your sign the sign happened when Christ rose from the dead and that sign is recorded for us in the word of God along with every other sign so that this word becomes now our sign this is your sign this written word in its beauty its consistency in its entirety this is your sign I'll close with this we're thinking in the morning of what Christ said to Thomas
Thomas because though has seen me though has believed blessed are they that have not seen and yet have believed and listen John says but these things are written that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ the son of God and that in believing you might have life through his name here is your sign here is your sign the word that we have spoken and let it be a sign to you let it be a sign the Christ who came out of the belly not with bleached skin but with wounds in his hand in his feet and in his side which he carries forever as a memorial to the life that he purchased for you by his own death upon the cross believe and you shall live let us pray Lord of God enable us to take to heart the message of the gospel and to lay hold of the Christ who entered the belly of death itself who entered the belly of the earth when his soul was severed from his body for whoever fearful the belly of the quail may have been still it is as nothing compared to death grant us therefore to embrace the one who came back in resurrection life and make Christ precious to our souls that we might believe and our souls live for Christ's sake
Amen

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