

LESSONS' FROM JONAH THE PROPHET

By
G. C. Willis



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LESSONS FROM JONAH THE PROPHET

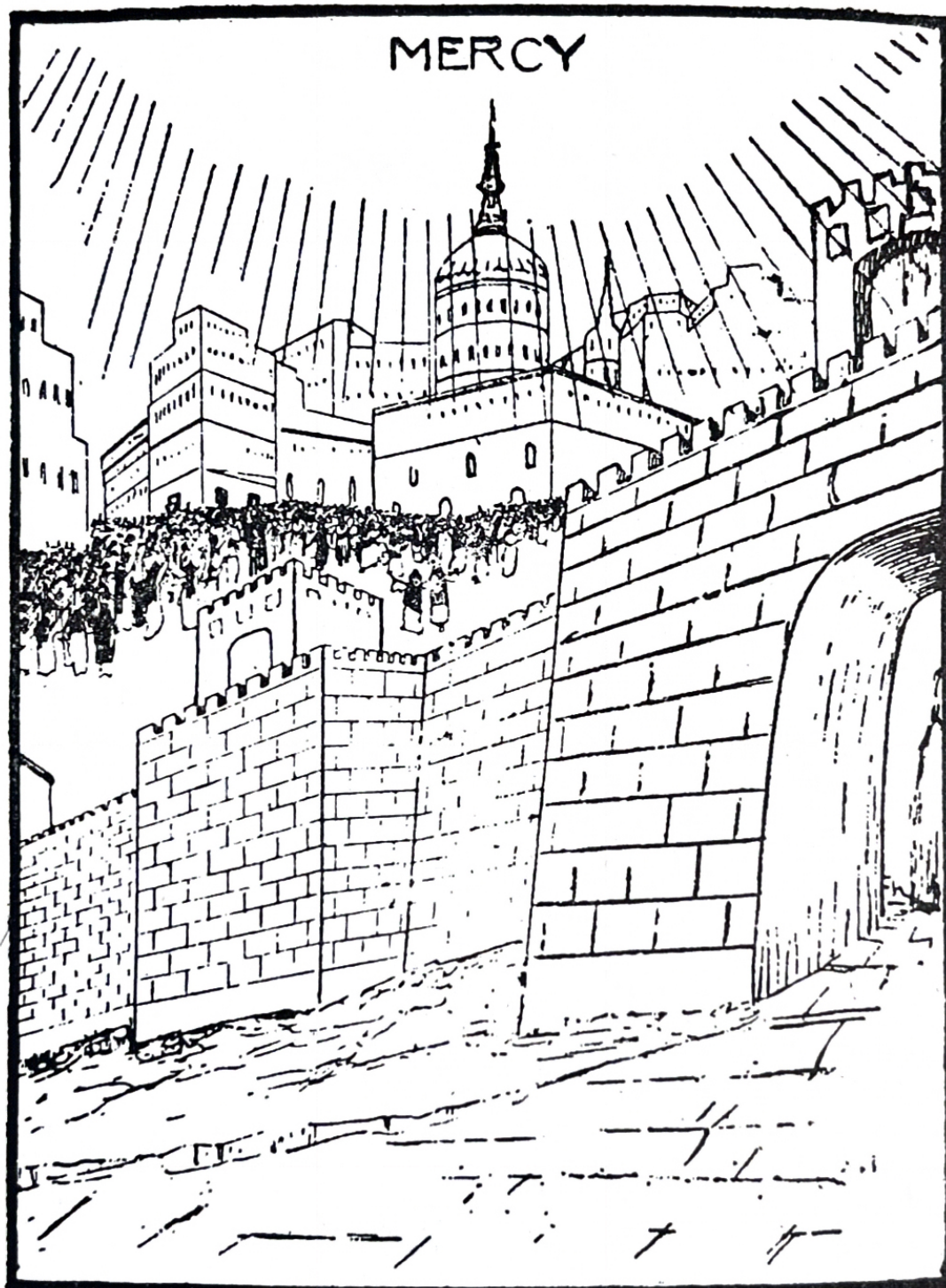
(The Book of Jonah; 2 Kings 14:25)

By

G. C. WILLIS

*"For as Jonas was a sign unto the
Ninevites, so shall also the Son of man
be to this generation."* Luke 11:30

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"Then said the LORD, ... should not
I spare *Nineveh*, that great city."

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FOREWORD

The author of these meditations on the book of Jonah has been a missionary in China for many years. It was first thought to publish this book in Chinese, as well as in English, hence the many references to the differences in expression between the Chinese and English translations of the Bible.

These meditations were written before the outbreak of World War II which struck first in China and later engulfed the whole world and lay preserved in a warehouse in Shanghai, while the author was in an internment camp and were found by him upon his return and sent on for publication.

We are now sending them forth and trust that they may be used of the Lord in blessing to many, in the presentation of the gospel to the unsaved and also for the edification of those who know the Lord Jesus as Savior.

The illustrations shown, considered quite essential in working in China, were prepared for the Chinese edition.



CHAPTER ONE

JONAH REBELS

In the northern part of the Kingdom of Israel, not far from the Mediterranean Sea, lies the territory of the tribe of Zebulon. In the southern part of Zebulon, three or four miles from the city of Nazareth, lay the town of Gath-Hepher.

About 850 years before the Lord Jesus was "brought up" (Luke 4:16) in Nazareth, there lived in Gath-Hepher a man named Jonah. The Bible does not tell us whether he was born in Gath-Hepher or not, but merely says of him, "which was of Gath-Hepher." (2 Kings 14:25)

We are not told just *when* he lived, but Jeroboam, the son of Joash, king of Israel, fulfilled Jonah's gracious prophecy by restoring the coast of Israel from the entering in of Hamath unto the Sea of the Plain. (2 Kings 14:25)

The prophet Elisha had died during the reign of Joash the father of Jeroboam (2 Kings 13:14), so it is possible that they were contemporaries, and knew each other. It is, perhaps, still more probable that Jonah and Hosea lived and labored at the same time.

It is not without a purpose that the Spirit of God tells us that Jonah was of Gath-Hepher. We have noted that this was a town of Zebulon. If we turn back to Deuteronomy 33:18, to the blessing of "Moses the man of God," we will see that he said, "Rejoice, Zebulon, in thy going out; and Issachar, in thy tents." It would appear that Zebulon's special portion from the Lord was to "go out." How truly did "The Prophet" (Deut. 15:18) whom the Lord raised up, our own Lord and Master, brought up in Nazareth in the country of Zebulon, fulfil this char-

acter of Zebulon — to “go out.” Out from the palace of His glory, down to this world of woe, His path was ever one of “going out,” till we read of that last terrible day when “He bearing His cross, *went forth* into a place called the place of a skull.”

Had Jonah realized the portion and the privilege that God had given him in belonging to the tribe of Zebulon, he would, according to the terms of the blessing, have *rejoiced* in his going out, but sad to say, Jonah is famous for his reluctance, rather than his joy, in *going out*.

It is true that Issachar, the tribe that was called to “Rejoice,” in association with Zebulon, had their portion in their tents, rather than in going out. It is not every one to whom there is given the privilege of going forth to heathen lands, with a message from the Lord, as was given to Jonah; and, alas, it is not every one to whom this privilege is given, who rejoices in it!

Let us now, with these considerations as a background, seek by the Lord’s help, to examine “The Book of Jonah.”

Of the absolute truth of this wonderful little book, no true Christian should have the slightest doubt. It is endorsed by the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. He says, “As Jonas 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. The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it; because they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here.” (Matthew 12:40-41) In these verses the Lord gives His own authority to the truth of the two most wonderful incidents in this remarkable Book. It would be easy to show from well authenticated facts that nothing is related in this Book, but what is perfectly possible, and has since been experienced in some degree by others; but the true Christian does not

turn to such external evidences when he has the Word of his Lord and Master on which to rest. We will however take the liberty of quoting the following remarkable paragraphs from Mr. Gook's book, "Can a Young Man Trust?"

"At least two accounts have been given of the event, agreeing in every particular, and the whole subject has been sifted carefully by M. de Parville, editor of the famous *Journal des Debats*, whose name and reputation as a scientist are a sufficient answer to those who call the story of Jonah into question from a scientific stand-point. The detailed report is as follows:

"Last February the whaling ship, 'Star of the East' was in the vicinity of the Falkland Islands searching for whales, which were very scarce. One morning the lookout sighted a whale about three miles away on the starboard quarter. Two boats were manned. In a short time one of the boats was near enough to enable the harpooner to send a spear into the whale, which proved to be an exceedingly large one. With the shaft in his side the animal sounded and then sped away, dragging the boat after him with terrible speed. He swam straight away about five miles, when he turned and came back almost directly toward the spot where he had been harpooned.

The second boat waited for him, and when but a short distance away from it he rose to the surface. As soon as his back showed above the surface of the water the harpooner in the second boat drove another spear into him. The pain apparently crazed the whale, for it threshed about fearfully, and it was feared that the boats would be swamped and the crews drowned. Finally the whale swam away, dragging the two boats after him. He went about three miles and sounded or sank, and his whereabouts could not be exactly told. The lines attached to the har-

poons were slack, and the harpooners began slowly to draw them in and coil them in the tubs. As soon as they were tautened, the whale arose to the surface and beat about with its tail in the maddest fashion. The boats attempted to get beyond the reach of the animal, which was apparently in its death agonies, and one of them succeeded, but the other was less fortunate. The whale struck it with his nose and upset it.

The men were thrown into the water, and before the crew of the other boat could pick them up one man was drowned, and James Bartley had disappeared. When the whale became quiet from exhaustion the waters were searched for Bartley, but he could not be found, and, under the impression that he had been struck by the whale's tail and sunk to the bottom, the survivors rowed back to the ship.

The whale was dead, and in a few hours the great body was lying by the ship's side, and the men were busy with axes and spades cutting through the flesh to secure the fat. They worked all day and part of the night. They resumed operations the next forenoon, and were soon down to the stomach, which was to be hoisted to the deck. The workmen were startled while laboring to clear it and to fasten the chain about it, to discover something doubled up in it that gave spasmodic signs of life. The vast pouch was hoisted to the deck and cut open, and inside was found the missing sailor, doubled up and unconscious. He was laid out on deck and treated to a bath of sea-water, which soon revived him, but his mind was not clear, and he was placed in the captain's quarters, where he remained two weeks a raving lunatic. He was carefully treated by the captain and officers of the ship, and he finally began to get possession of his senses.

At the end of the third week he had entirely recov-

ered from the shock, and resumed his duties. During the brief sojourn in the whale's belly Bartley's skin, where it was exposed to the action of the gastric juices, underwent a striking change. His face and hands were bleached to a deathly whiteness, and the skin was wrinkled, giving the man the appearance of having been parboiled. Bartley affirms that he would probably have lived inside his house of flesh until he starved, for he lost his senses through fright, and not from lack of air. He says that he remembers the sensation of being lifted into the air by the nose of the whale and of dropping into the water. Then there was a frightful rushing sound, which he believed to be the beating of water by the whale's tail, then he was encompassed by a fearful darkness, and he felt himself slipping along a smooth passage of some sort that seemed to move and carry him forward. This sensation lasted but an instant, then he felt that he had more room. He felt about him, and his hands came in contact with a yielding slimy substance that seemed to shrink from his touch.

It finally dawned upon him that he had been swallowed by the whale, and he was overcome by horror at the situation. He could breathe easily, but the heat was terrible. It was not of a scorching, stifling nature, but it seemed to open the pores of his skin and to draw out his vitality. He became very weak, and grew sick at the stomach. He knew that there was no hope of escape from his strange prison. Death stared him in the face, and he tried to look at it bravely, but the awful quiet, the fearful darkness, the horrible knowledge of his environments, and the terrible heat finally overcame him, and he must have fainted, for the next he remembered was being in the captain's cabin.

Bartley is not a man of a timid nature, but he says that it was many weeks before he could pass a night with-

out having his sleep disturbed with harrowing dreams of angry whales and the horrors of his fearful prison. The skin on the face and hands of Bartley has never recovered its natural appearance. It is yellow and wrinkled, and looks like old parchment.

The health of the man does not seem to have been affected by his terrible experience. He is in splendid spirits, and apparently fully enjoys all the blessings of life that come his way. The whaling captains say that they never remember a parallel case to this before. They say that it frequently happens that men are swallowed by whales who become infuriated by the pain of the harpoon and attack the boats, but they have never known a man to go through the ordeal that Bartley did and come out alive."

This story has received the support of one of the most careful and painstaking scientists in Europe, M. de Parville, editor of the *Journal des Debats*, who remarks that the accounts given by the captain and the crew of the English whaler are worthy of belief. He says; "There are many cases reported where whales in the fury of their dying agony have swallowed human beings, but this is the first modern case where the victim has come forth safe and sound. After this modern illustration I end by believing that Jonah really did come out from the whale alive as the Bible records."

Let us now turn to the first verse of the first chapter: "And the word of Jehovah came unto Jonah the son of Amittai." It is worthy of note that in the little Book before us, Jonah is never called a "prophet." The Holy Spirit uses the writer of 2 Kings to give him this title. We might pause for a moment to ask what meaning the word "*prophet*" has in Scripture. The Chinese characters which are generally used to translate *prophet*, give us to understand that a prophet is one who tells us what will happen

in the future. Truly this is very often so, but if we read the Books of the Prophets in the Bible, we will find that this is only a small part of God's work for these men. Perhaps we will find God's own definition of this word by comparing Exodus 4:16 and 7:1. In the first Scripture God says of Aaron, "He shall be thy spokesman unto the people;" and in the latter Scripture, God says, "Aaron thy brother shall be thy *prophet*." Perhaps this gives us the clearest definition of a prophet according to the Word of God: he is God's "spokesman unto the people." Very often God speaks of judgment or blessing to come, and then the spokesman speaks of what will happen in the future. But his first duty is to be God's spokesman, which very often includes rebuke, or exhortation. Let us always remember that the most important thing for a prophet is that he speaks *for God*, not for himself, or of himself. The Greek word "prophetes" from which we get the English word "prophet," has exactly this meaning. Liddell & Scott's Greek Lexicon says of it, "Properly *one who speaks for another*, especially *one who speaks for a God*, and interprets his will to man, *a prophet*." From this we may see that the characters generally used in the Chinese Bible to translate "prophet" are misleading, and do not tell out the true meaning of the original Scriptures.

If Jonah himself wrote this little Book that bears his name, we may easily understand and appreciate the absence of the title "*prophet*" in this Book. We can also understand and appreciate the fact that God takes care that another writer shall put upon him that honorable title that his own hand would not take. The Lord Jesus Himself delights to honor Jonah with this title. (Matt. 12:39, etc.)

It is said that the name "Jonah" means "a dove." A dove is the symbol of peace: and the Book is in reality

an offer of peace from the Lord Himself. It is not, as we shall see, and offer of peace to the people of Nineveh only, but to others as well. It is said that the name "Amittai" (the father of Jonah), means "Truth." May it not be, that in these two names, we have told out the same precious message of John 1:17, "*Grace and Truth* came by Jesus Christ"? Truth is the light that shows our sins. Grace provides the means to cover our sins. How clearly we see these two sides of God's character shown out in the little Book we are considering! God is a God of truth, and He must have all our paths brought into the light of His truth; but where can we find a brighter example of the grace of God that is ever ready to pardon and forgive? As we read this little book we must ever remember that Jonah is truly a type of our Lord Jesus Christ, and how beautifully do these two names illustrate this!

In connection with this first verse, we must notice that there was no manner of doubt as to the source of the command that came to Jonah: "Now the word of the *LORD* came unto Jonah." Jonah's trouble did not lie in a lack of *authority* to act. As we consider the Book further, we will see that the trouble with Jonah was very different: no lack of authority, but lack of *will to obey* that authority. Beloved friends, are we not sometimes very much like Jonah? We know perfectly well that the blessed Book in our hands, the Bible, is the very Word of God. It can be truthfully said that the Word of the Lord has come unto us. The Lord Jesus Christ in that Word has made absolutely clear what His commands are. On the one hand, we have "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden." I suppose that most of our readers have heard this call, and have taken it as a personal call to themselves, and have obeyed it. On the other hand the same lips that said "Come unto Me," also said, "Go ye into all the world

and preach the gospel to every creature." We have been glad to obey the call "*Come*," we have been glad to obtain the *rest* that He promised, but when it comes to the command "*Go ye*," we are too often like Jonah, not so eager to obey. It is amazing the ingenious excuses we can find for avoiding, or refusing, or postponing obedience to that call. Most of us, as a matter of fact, are not in any position to criticize Jonah because he tried to avoid obedience to the command, "*Go*." Most of us are just as clear as to the Divine source of the command as Jonah was, when "the word of the *LORD* came unto Jonah." Most of us are just as clear as to the authority behind the command. The real trouble does not lie in any doubt as to the Divine Source, or the Divine Authority: the real trouble lies in our own wretched wills.

Oh, Jonah, Jonah, how shall I condemn thee?

Thy condemnation, it were but mine own!

"Now the Word of the Lord came unto Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before Me."

"*Arise*." That is where a lot of the trouble is. It takes energy to *arise*. We are so comfortably settled down! It is very hard to shake off the weights of home and business and comfort, and "*arise*."

"*Arise, Go*." Not only was Jonah to *arise*, but he had the very same orders that we have, "*Go!*" You remember the Roman centurion who came to the Lord, and said to Him, "I also am a man set under authority, having under me soldiers; and I say unto one, *Go*, and he goeth." (Luke 7:8) This centurion thoroughly understood authority. If he said "*Go!*" there was no question about it, the soldier went, but when the Lord said "*Go!*" to Jonah, Jonah decided he would not go. The soldier did not dream of complaining that the way was too long, or too rough, or too

dangerous, or the time was not convenient; he did not suggest that he did not want to go, or that he was too busy with other work. No, the soldier understood authority, and went. When the Captain says, "Go!" he goeth.

You will recall that the same word is used of the prodigal in Luke 15. "I will *arise* and go to my father." It may be that many a time he had said, "I ought to go to my father," or, "I must go to my father," but it was not until he did finally *arise* that he ever reached his father. It took the energy of faith to arise. Most of our readers understand experimentally what it meant for them to arise and go to their Father. May God help us to understand experimentally what it means for us to arise and go to them that sit in darkness!

How many there are of us to whom the Lord has said "GO!" and we have been like Jonah, and refused. It may be that we have been so busy with our own affairs, that we have hardly heard Him say "GO," or it may be that we know so little of authority, that we decide that there is no need to obey, but think we may choose our own will instead. May the Lord give us each one to hear His voice, speaking with Divine authority, authority we dare not question, saying to us, "ARISE! GO!" "ARISE, GO TO NINEVEH."

Not only did the Lord tell Jonah to "Arise, Go," but He told him just where he was to go. He did not say, "Arise, go anywhere you like"; but He told him just where to go. The Lord will tell *us* where to go. It may be that the Lord will send us to someone in our own family, or to our neighbors, or it may be to those of a different nation, speech and language, at the other end of the earth. Do you remember at the Passover, if the roast lamb proved to be more than one household needed, they were to share it with "his neighbour next unto his house?"

(Ex. 12:4) Have we taken time to feed on the roast Lamb, as well as to take shelter behind His precious blood? Have we found the roast Lamb to be an inexhaustible feast, enough for me and my household, with unlimited supplies for my neighbor next to my house? That is a good place to begin. Let us each one share the roast Lamb with our neighbor in the house next unto us and we may find in time, as our Lord pointed out to the lawyer, that "my neighbor" may be one of another nation, one who for years has been despised and scorned and neglected; then let me go and share the roast Lamb with him also. Let us be clear, the Lord may send us where He will, be it near or far. Because He is God the Lord, *our Lord*, He has the right, and the authority, to send us anywhere He pleases.

What of Nineveh—"Nineveh, the great city" (new translation)? Three times in this little Book we read these words, "Nineveh, the great;" and once we read, "Nineveh was an exceeding great city." We first read of Nineveh in Genesis 10:6-13, "The sons of Ham: Cush begat Nimrod . . . the beginning of his kingdom was Babel. . . . From that land went out Asshur, and built Nineveh," or, "He" (Nimrod) "went to Assyria and built Nineveh . . . this is the great city." It was founded by the descendants of a man under a curse, and God Himself must say of it, "Their wickedness is come up before me." (Jonah 1:2)

Babylon was built on the Euphrates, and was the capital of Babylonia. Nineveh was built on the river Tigris (or Hiddekel of Genesis 2:14) and was the capital of Assyria.

Through the goodness and wisdom of God, we may have a good knowledge of Nineveh, even though at the present day there is nothing to be seen of it but a few mounds of rubbish. In the year 1840 Mr. Layard passed

"the great mound of Nimrod," while he was floating down the river Tigris. In 1845 he began to dig in the mound. Mr. Layard published an account of these excavations, with most interesting pictures, which give us a marvelous account of this wonderful city of old.

We have tried to reproduce a few of Mr. Layard's pictures, including one of what he believed the palace was like. These pictures may give us some very slight idea of the greatness and magnificence of this "exceeding great city." The winged bull shown (see page 54,) is taken directly from Mr. Layard's picture of this huge creature, which now, with many others, is in the British Museum.

As we read the story of Jonah, bearing in mind the greatness and magnificence of which these old stone relics tell us, it needs no great stretch of the imagination to see the prophet Jonah standing on those palace steps, or beside the great winged bull, preaching his short sermon: "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!"

How striking is the difference between Jonah's message and ours! Jonah's message was altogether one of judgment without a word of mercy. Yet both preacher and hearers read in this message, and read correctly, an offer of mercy. Otherwise, why send the warning of judgment? It is well for us to remember that in every message of judgment, there is hidden an offer of mercy, if the guilty ones will but take warning and repent.

Our message, what is it? True it contains a message of judgment, and coming wrath; but *our* message is not characterized by judgment but by mercy. Never has any messenger had such a glorious message to deliver, "God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." The message of judgment aroused a fervent desire to find a way of escape that they should not

perish; but that *way* of escape is the theme of our message: "I am the Way." Our message is to tell of a living, loving Person, a Savior, our Lord Jesus Christ. O beloved friends, what a contrast is our message to Jonah's! What an unspeakable privilege is ours! May we value it far more highly!

As we gaze on these awe-inspiring relics of the past greatness of a mighty city, one wonders less that Jonah should shrink and run away from such an undertaking as to go alone, single-handed, and preach against one of the oldest, greatest and mightiest cities of the earth. And such a sermon: "Yet Forty Days, and Nineveh Shall be Overthrown!" Humanly speaking, Jonah's life would certainly be forfeited if this message should reach the ears of the king; and one has very keen sympathy for Jonah in not liking the task given to him. Many a man in our day has shrunk, and turned aside, from a very much easier mission than that to which Jonah was called. We need not wonder at all if Jonah felt that he could not face the risk of losing his head, for well he knew the fame of Nineveh, the reports of its greatness, and the power of its king.

It does not seem to have been fear for his personal safety that made Jonah turn aside from the clear command given him by God. In reading the book of Jonah, one is impressed with Jonah's courage, not with his cowardice. In the second and third verses of the fourth chapter, we hear Jonah saying (after God had spared Nineveh): "Ah, Jehovah, was not this my saying when I was yet in my country? *Therefore* I was minded to flee at first unto Tarshish; for I knew that Thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great loving-kindness, and repentest Thee of the evil." Jonah well knew God's character for mercy—it would be hard to find a more glorious description of it than here. Did Jonah think that

he could presume on God's mercy, and loving-kindness, to dare to disobey Him? Is it not possible that *we*, who glory in the knowledge of the love and grace of God, as revealed in His Son our Lord Jesus Christ, sometimes presume on that grace and love to treat His commands with lightness? May God in His mercy preserve us from such a sin; and open our eyes, if we have already been guilty of it.

Jonah's reluctance to obey, appears to have been fear that God would turn from His wrath and spare Nineveh. Was this the pride of heart that could not bear to "lose face," as we would say in China? Or, was it the bitter prejudice of an Israelite towards a Gentile nation? Or, did Jonah's eye look forward some fifty years and see the king of Nineveh coming against his own native land? (2 Kings 15:19)

Do you remember how Elisha wept as he told Hazael the terrible things that he would do to Israel when he became king? Jonah may, with equal clearness, have looked down the years, and have seen the terrible judgment that Assyria would yet bring on Israel, a judgment that lasts to the present day.

Perhaps we cannot clearly read all the motives that moved in Jonah's heart to cause him to venture to disobey God deliberately. Indeed which of us would dare to say that we can read our own motives clearly in much that we do? We have often far less reason than Jonah for refusing, or neglecting, to "Arise and Go" at the call of God; and were we to judge our own motives honestly in the sight of God, we might be greatly shocked.

"But Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of Jehovah." (Jonah 1:3)

Foolish man! He, prophet of Jehovah, ought to have known better! "Who hath hardened himself against Him,

and had peace?" (or, "hath prospered"). (Job 9:4) Job well knew there was neither peace nor prosperity in seeking to refuse obedience to God. Jonah (and you and I), should know this same great truth, and yet how slow we are to learn it!

Foolish man! for he had probably often read and sung the Psalm of David in which we get the question, "Whither shall I go from Thy Spirit? and whither flee from Thy presence? If I ascend up into the heavens Thou art there; or if I make my bed in Sheol, behold Thou art there; If I take the wings of the dawn and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there shall Thy hand lead me, and Thy right hand shall hold me. And if I say, Surely darkness shall cover me, and the light about me be night; even darkness hideth not from Thee, and the night shineth as the day: the darkness is as the light." (Psalm 139:7-12) Yet "Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of Jehovah." Where was Tarshish? Some have thought that it was in Spain, but the exports of Tarshish: gold, silver, ivory, apes and peacocks (2 Chron. 9:21), are not the exports of Spain, as "The Bible League Quarterly" (Oct.-Dec., 1940 number) points out in a most interesting article. This writer brings very strong proof to show that Tarshish was in South India. Amongst other reasons he quotes an account given by Herodotus of a voyage to Tarshish. About 600 B.C. Pharaoh-Necho of Egypt sent Phoenicians with ships to go through the Straits of Gibraltar, around Africa to Tarshish, and to return the same way. When autumn came, they would put to shore, sow the land wherever they might happen to be, and then wait for the harvest. In this way they kept up their supplies; he tells us it took three years to make the return voyage.

So Jonah started on this, the longest known journey,

in his day, to try to escape from his God. It would be years before he could return. Truly Jonah was trying to "dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea!"

"And he went down to Joppa and found a ship going to Tarshish." It is always going *down* when we seek to leave the Lord. This was his first outward step *down*, but it was by no means his last. The outward step is generally preceded by an *inward* or spiritual step *down*. It is easier to go down than to go up, whether it be for body or soul. Beware, dear fellow-Christian, when the path begins to go downward, when the travel is easy, and there is no hill to climb! We can be reasonably sure then that we have got on the wrong road.

Notice, too, that apparently with no difficulty or delay, he "found a ship going to Tarshish." Perhaps he thought, "This is quite providential! This is surely a sign that I am being prospered in my way." It is wonderful how easy the devil makes our downward pathway. He is always ready to provide all we need to get away from the Lord. Do not let us think for a moment that because the downward road is an easy one, therefore it must be right. The ship already "going to Tarshish" was absolutely no proof that God had "prepared" it. (chap. 1:4; 1:17; 4:6; 4:7; 4:8.) Quite the reverse was the truth, and we ever need to bear in mind that things made ready to our hand to help us to do our own will, are by no means prepared for us by God, but very possibly prepared for us by the devil.

"So he paid the fare thereof, and went down into it, to go with them unto Tarshish from the presence of Jehovah."

"So he paid the fare thereof." Of course he did! A terribly high fare it must have been for that long journey. The Lord asks, "Who goeth a warfare at any time at his

own charges?" (1 Cor. 9:7) If we are going in the service of the Lord, we may be quite sure that He will see about "the fare;" but if we are going to please ourselves, or in the service of the devil, "the fare" must be paid! Friends, how very costly is that fare at times! There is many a man who has refused the call of God, and turned to his own way and "the fare" has been his peace of mind, the rest of heart that the Lord alone can give as we bear His yoke, and perhaps the loss, the eternal loss, of his children. A comfortable home down here, a nice motor car, a big bank balance—all these cannot begin to make up for the price we have had to pay for "the fare." It is a costly thing to disobey God. Note that although Jonah had paid the fare to Tarshish (a long, long journey, and we may be sure a very high fare), yet we never hear that he got a refund because he did not get to his destination. The devil *takes* but he does not *give*, and the only wages he pays is *death*. (Rom. 6:23) His service is bad, his "fares" are the highest, and his wages are the worst: yet strange to say, he always has a mighty following. *Thou*, Most Blessed Master, *Thou*, whose yoke is easy and whose burden is light: *Thou*, whose service is the best, joy and peace and rest: *Thou*, who hast received us when hopeless bankrupts, hast paid our every debt, and who now payest all our charges, and whose "wages" (John 4:36) are the very highest—how few are Thy laborers! Strange, most passing strange! Even those whom Thou hast redeemed prefer, too often, the service of self or of this world. Too often, in our eyes, ease and luxury and riches of this world, are more attractive than the cross that Thou dost offer to those who follow Thee. Help us, most gracious Lord, to take up our cross daily and to follow Thee; to present our bodies a living sacrifice, which is indeed our only reasonable service!

"So he paid the fare thereof and *went down into it.*" Here we get Jonah's second downward step—first down to Joppa, then down into the boat. But Jonah was to go further down yet, as we shall see.

"He paid the fare thereof and went down into it, *to go with them unto Tarshish from the presence of the LORD.*"

"To go . . . from the presence of the LORD." That was the object of going down into the boat. A terrible confession it is, and how futile! The very next verse tells us:

"But the LORD sent out a great wind into the sea, and there was a mighty tempest in the sea, so that the ship was like to be broken."

Instead of succeeding in fleeing from the presence of the LORD by going down into that ship, the ship bore him into the midst of that tempest, where amidst the storm and the waves, alone on the vast deep, Jonah was to meet the Lord, and find himself in the very presence of the One from whom he was seeking to escape.

Notice those words, "The LORD *sent out* a great wind." We will have occasion to notice the various things that God "prepared" for Jonah's sake. There was the "great fish," "a gourd," "a worm" and a "sultry east wind." It does not, however, say that God *prepared* the "great wind," spoken of in the 4th verse of our chapter. Psalm 135:7 tells us that God "bringeth the wind out of His treasures." So instead of saying He prepared the wind, it says: "The LORD *sent out* a great wind into the sea." Surely that word "sent" is not used here by accident. What a sad and solemn contrast to Jonah does that "great wind" present! Both were sent by the same LORD. The stormy wind goes when and where it is sent, "fulfilling His word." (Ps. 148:8) Man, the highest work of His creation, deliberately chooses his own will, and re-

fuses to go, when his Lord and Master sends him!

"Then the mariners were afraid, and cried every man unto his god, and cast forth the wares that were in the ship into the sea, to lighten it of them."

Alas, these heathen mariners did not know Jehovah, the true God, the God who made the sea and the dry land, the God whom Jonah knew; and in their trouble they turned to the false gods of the heathen. In Psalm 107:23-32 we get a wonderful description of a storm at sea, commanded and sent by Jehovah, and the result is "Then they cry unto Jehovah in their trouble, and He bringeth them out of their distresses; He maketh the storm a calm, and the waves thereof are still." These mariners did not know Jehovah, and could not call upon Him. The Scripture well asks, "How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?" These men had not *heard*, so could not *believe* on the true God, therefore, instead of calling on Him, they called every man on his god. Since such gods could neither save nor help them, they turned to their own expedients—throwing the cargo overboard. However, their prayers and their wisdom and their works were all unavailing. They were dealing now with Jehovah, the true God, and they were to learn something of Him and His power.

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Where was Jonah all this time? Was he crying to *his* God? No, far from it. Listen: "But Jonah had gone down into the lower part of the ship; and he lay, and was fast asleep." Still a third step down for Jonah: down to Joppa, down into the ship, down into the lower part of the ship. Alas, for Jonah, he was to go still further down.

In a downward pathway we cannot, as we suppose, stop when and where we will. What a strange position to find the heathen mariners in their terrible danger, calling on their gods to save them, while the one and only man on board that ship who knew the true and living God, did not trouble to call upon Him, but lay and was fast asleep. How like us! In a day when trouble seems about to overwhelm all about us, men's hearts failing them for fear, how often do we find the people of the Lord asleep, content to go on in their own immediate circle, without a care for the sorrows and troubles of those about them, without a thought of those on every hand who do not know the true and living God whom we know, and yet we are content to sleep on through it all!

Notice the contrast between Jonah, down in the sides of the ship, fast asleep, while the ship was likely to be broken, and Jonah's Lord, "in the hinder part of the ship, asleep on a pillow." The one wearied *of* the service of Him who sent him, wearied in his vain efforts to flee from His presence; the Other, wearied *in* the service of Him who sent Him was snatching a few moments of well-earned rest even amidst the storm. The one was careless and callous to the danger to himself and those with him in the ship; the Other, even while He slept, "upholding all things by the word of His power" (Heb. 13), by His very presence, was preserving all with Him on board from every danger, so that after stilling the storm, He could turn to them and ask, "Why are ye so fearful? how is it that ye have no faith?" (Mark 4:37-41)

"And the shipmaster came to him and said unto him, What meanest thou, sleeper? Arise, call upon thy God; perhaps God will think upon us, that we perish not."

Good, sensible shipmaster! He well knew what Jonah ought to be doing, surely not sleeping at such a time!

Arise, call upon thy God! It is a message from the heathen about us that we all would do well to hear. We cannot all go out to the heathen, but we all can arise and call upon our God. Was not this just the point? Jonah could not arise and call upon his God nor do we hear that he even tried to do as the shipmaster commanded him. How could Jonah call on the name of the very One from whose presence he was even then fleeing? No, dear fellow-Christian, you and I know very well that sin and prayer do not go together: we must give up one or the other. Sad to say, Jonah had chosen *sin*, and he could not pray. As we noted before, he did not even try to pray. He knew perfectly well what was the cause of that storm, and he knew equally well the remedy. This was not a time for prayer, but a time for confession, and bowing to the just punishment that he so rightly merited for his sin against his God. Though indeed confession and prayer might, and should, have been found together in the same breath.

Jonah had not yet come to the point, however, where he was willing to confess his sin. We all know about this. We all have sinned, and we all have come to the point where we knew that we ought to confess our sin to those whom we had wronged—not the public confession to those with whom the sin had nothing to do, making the confession into a deed of merit: not that sort of confession was needed from Jonah, but to tell humbly that *he*, and he only, was the cause of this storm—because of his sin against his God. Jonah had not yet come to the point where he was willing to humble himself to do this. Therefore, God allowed these heathen sailors to force him to do what he would not do of his own will.

Note also those words from the heathen shipmaster, "Perhaps God will think upon us, that we perish not." I love those words. True, he did not know God as Jonah

knew Him, for who could give a truer and more glorious character to God than Jonah: "I knew that Thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great loving-kindness, and repentest Thee of the evil." Jonah could truly say he "knew" God, but the shipmaster did not know a God of such a character. The heathen knew nothing of a God like this: but he does venture to hope:

"Arise call upon thy God, *Perhaps* God will think upon us, *that we perish not.*" Later we hear them pray, not every man to his god, but this time to Jehovah Himself, and they say, "Ah, Jehovah, we beseech Thee, *let us not perish* for this man's life." (Jonah 1:14) Later again, we hear the king of Nineveh, another heathen, exhorting his people to turn from their sins, "Who knoweth but that God will turn . . . *that we perish not.*" There may have been but the feeblest, and most ignorant turning to the true God, the object before them being only *that they should not perish*, but how richly did God meet them in each case.

Can we read those words "*perish not*," repeated three times, without thinking of that most glorious of verses, "God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him *should not perish*, but have everlasting life"? Truly God has found a way so that the vilest of sinners *should not perish*. How can we, who have tasted of such grace and love, ever cease to praise Him? How can we refuse or neglect to tell out such glorious news to those who have never heard? How can we let them go on and perish in their sins?

"And they said each one to his fellow, Come, and let us cast lots, that we may know for whose cause this evil is upon us. And they cast lots, and the lot fell upon Jonah." Now Jonah is left without any other choice. Surely it was God Himself who directed that lot, and Jonah knew it.

He can cover his sin no longer, but God Himself has forced that confession that he would not make of his own free will.

It is good when God acts similarly with us, as indeed He often does. He that covereth his sin shall not prosper (Prov. 28:13); and if we will not voluntarily confess our sin, it is good that God should use His own means to force that sin into the open; for only then can He bring blessing to us. "When I kept silence, my bones waxed old, through my groaning all the day long. For day and night Thy hand was heavy upon me; my moisture was turned into the drought of summer. Selah. I acknowledged my sin unto Thee, and mine iniquity I covered not; I said, I will confess my transgression unto Jehovah, and THOU forgavest the iniquity of my sin. Selah." (Ps. 32:3-5)

Notice how many questions they asked Jonah, now that the lot had fallen upon him. "Tell us, we pray thee, For whose cause this evil is upon us: What is thine occupation? And whence comest thou? What is thy country? And of what people art thou?"

These questions may well search our own hearts. Let us face that first question. "Tell us, we pray thee, for whose cause this evil is upon us." The presence of a Christian, a saint of God (for every true Christian is truly "a saint")—the presence of such a one should be a blessing to any company of people. He should be like a light shining in a dark place, a little candle to give light to those about him; but Jonah was very different. Rather than being a blessing to the company of men on that ship, he brought a curse with him. It was *he* who brought that storm, or at least God sent it for his sake. How very solemn a thing it is if God in dealing with *us* for our unfaithfulness and sin must bring trouble and distress to those about us! The Bible says truly, "None of us liveth

to himself." (Rom. 14:7) We cannot say, "This is my own business and makes no difference to anybody else." Jonah's disobedience made a great difference to those mariners. They got into a terrible storm, they lost their cargo by throwing it overboard in order to try to save the ship, and all because of the sin of a saint of God. It is a very searching question to ask ourselves, "Am I a blessing or a curse in the circle where I move?" For certain it is, you have an influence one way or the other. True it is that God brought blessing out of all this sin and trouble, and those sailors learned to know the true God through the disobedient prophet. That does not at all excuse him, however, and the sad, sad answer to the mariners' question was just this, if Jonah spoke the truth: "It is entirely for my cause. It is my fault, and only my fault that you have had all this danger and loss." May God deliver us from ever putting our friends and companions to sorrow and loss through our sin and unfaithfulness!

The second question is a searching one also. Let us face it honestly, "What is thine occupation?" You may have heard of the man about whom it was said, "Yes, that man is a Christian, but he is not working at it." How many of us are Christians, but not working at it! It would be hard for the world to know of some of us whose first occupation is to be down here "to the praise of His glory." (Eph. 1:14)

"And whence comest thou?" Very often we forget that we are "coming" from "the city of destruction," and that the world from which we have come is already condemned, that we no longer are of it, but that now our citizenship is in heaven. Too often nobody could guess that we are pilgrims and strangers down here (1 Peter 2:11), on our way to the Father's house.

"What is thy country?" This is a common question in

China. How often foreigners are asked, "What is your honorable country?" Can we truthfully reply, "My honorable country is heaven!" Does our manner of life show this forth? Dear fellow-Christian, you and I are not of the world, even as the Lord Jesus Christ was not of the world. (John 17:16) Our citizenship is in heaven. (Philippians 3:20) Oh, may that question of the heathen sailors, on Jonah's ship, sink down deeply into our hearts so that we may truthfully and joyfully sing,

"Called from above, and heavenly men by birth,
(Who once were but the citizens of earth)
As pilgrims here we seek a heavenly home,
Our portion in the ages yet to come."

"And of what people art thou?" May God help us never to be ashamed to say, "I am of the people of God. By God's grace, I am a follower of the despised and rejected One, whom this world cast out and crucified." It is an old saying, "A man is known by the company he keeps." Let it be so in our case, may our friends, our associates and our companions ever be God's people. True, there are times when we are compelled to mingle with the people of the world, but when this is so, may we be like those saints of old, of whom it is recorded, "Being let go, they went to their own company." (Acts 4:23)

If a saint of God is walking in obedience, walking with his Lord, it should not be needful to ask such questions as these—they should be apparent to all men. May the breathing of our hearts be:

"Oh, that it might be said of me,
Surely thy speech betrayeth thee,
As a friend of Christ of Galilee."

Now, notice Jonah's answer. He ignored all the questions but the last, and to this he replied: "I am a Hebrew." The name "Hebrew" seems to have been one of contempt.

Compare 1 Samuel 14:11. The name of dignity was "Israelite." "Israel," you will recall, means "A Prince with God." In Jonah's downward pathway, away from God, he had lost the sense of the dignity of his position and citizenship, and used the name that the enemies of Israel used of them in scorn. It is easy for us, also, to lose a sense of the dignity of the position in which the Lord has so graciously placed us, and sink down to acknowledge the names which the world in contempt and ignorance use of us. We have the name of *Christian* given to us in the New Testament. May the Lord help us to utterly refuse any name except this given us by God, and never acknowledge the names which have been given and taken by men in this world!

Now notice Jonah's next words—not an answer to their questions but better than that. He began to get his eyes off himself, and what a difference it made. "And I fear Jehovah, the God of the heavens, who hath made the sea and the dry land." The sailors had been crying every man to his god, but they did not know Jehovah, the God of the heavens. They prayed that the sea might be still from its raging, but they did not know the God who had made the sea. This was a fine answer that Jonah gave to these heathen sailors. He may have lost the sense of the dignity of the place into which God had put him, but he had not lost the sense of the God whom he feared. There, beloved friends, is the remedy for all our troubles. Turning our eyes away from self, away from the world, away from the raging seas around us, let us look off unto Jesus, and then, He will enable us to give a true and ringing testimony of the One whom we fear: "Whose I am, and whom I serve."

The result was grand. "Then were the men exceedingly afraid, and said, What is this thou hast done? For the men

knew that he fled from the presence of Jehovah; for he had told them." How often do the men of this world seem to have a truer conception of what is suitable in a Christian, than the Christian himself. How was it that Jonah was not "exceedingly afraid"? He had far more knowledge of the greatness and glory and holiness of the true and living God, who had made the sea and the dry land than these poor ignorant, heathen sailors; and yet *they* took a far truer view of Jonah's action than he took of it himself. It was an awful thing for a mere man to try and flee from the presence of such a God! One would think it would have been Jonah, not the sailors, who would have been exceedingly afraid. Such is the heart, even of a saint and a prophet of God! Note that Jonah had at last confessed his sin, with his good confession of his God.

"And they said unto him, What shall we do unto thee, that the sea may be calm unto us? for the sea grew more and more tempestuous." The matter is being pressed close home to Jonah now. "What shall we do unto thee?" Well Jonah knew that the awful storm about them, every moment getting worse and worse, was all his fault. Though Jonah had not "feared exceedingly" when he ought to have done so, now he began to find out that God is not mocked, and that it is no light thing to try and trifle with Him. I suppose that most of us are not in any position to say very many words of blame to Jonah. Have not most of us had to learn the same bitter lesson? How natural to the heart of man is the thought, and how eager the enemy is to tell us, that we may sin with impunity and "get away with it." No, beloved fellow-Christian, whether it was Jonah, or whether it is you or I, "God is not mocked." "Be sure your sin will find you out." (Num. 32:23) Sin will surely bring bitter, bitter fruit.

"And he said unto them, Take me up, and cast me

forth into the sea; so shall the sea be calm unto you: for I know that because of me this great tempest is upon you.” Brave Jonah! One cannot help but admire and love this man, in spite of all his failure. How many of us would have dared to pronounce so clearly our own death sentence, and so fully and frankly acknowledge our own guilt, and its consequence, without a single word of excuse or self-justification? He now plainly answered their third question, “For whose cause is the evil upon us?” When one considers that it must almost surely have been Jonah, himself, who wrote this book which bears his name (under the direct inspiration of the Spirit of God, of course), a book which has not a syllable to his own credit, one cannot help but honor this brave and honest man. What a death sentence! for humanly speaking, it could be nothing else. Cast forth out of that little ship; far, far from land, to sink down into those mountainous waves—what hope could there be of life in such a position? The mariners knew well the hopelessness of the condemned prophet, were his sentence carried out, so they rowed hard to regain the land. We learn to love and admire those kindly sailors, as we follow them through this voyage. How easy it would have been to throw Jonah overboard, and get a calm sea once more! But, no, they would not do this without one more hard try. So “the men rowed hard to regain the land; but they could not; for the sea grew more and more tempestuous against them.” It was hopeless. God Himself was sending that storm, not against *them*, it is true, but against His disobedient servant, and it is useless to fight against God. There was nothing left but to submit to His decree, as pronounced by His own prophet. Notice how this work of judgment is carried out. It is done with prayer. There is not a word of vindictiveness or blame against the man who had brought

such trouble upon them; instead we find the men, who shortly before had been crying every one unto his god, now crying to Jehovah. What a glorious change! "And they cried unto Jehovah and said, Ah, Jehovah, we beseech Thee, let us not perish for this man's life, and lay not upon us innocent blood: for Thou, Jehovah, hast done as it pleased Thee." What a wonderful growth in the knowledge of Jehovah, the true God, do we find in this short prayer! They have turned to God from idols (1 Thess. 1:9), and that last sentence, "Thou hast done as it pleased Thee," seems to reveal a knowledge of the greatness and power of God, combined with a sweet submission to His will, that might well be the envy of us all. We have already noted that this is the second time these men used the word "perish," and truly God heard their cry, and they perished not.

"And they took up Jonah, and cast him forth into the sea: and the sea ceased from its raging." I am sure that Jonah, also, humbly submitted to the terrible punishment that God saw fit to inflict upon him, the death penalty, pronounced by his own lips, but chosen by God Himself. I have little doubt that it was a solemn moment on board that ship, as the prophet prepared to die, and the sailors were compelled to carry out that sentence of death on the very man that had first told them of the true and living God, and who had been the means of turning them to Him from their idols. It may well be that a strong bond of love had sprung up between the prophet and the seamen during their stormy passage together. They well knew that he was voluntarily going down into death in order to save their lives. They could truly say, "He gave himself for us;" "He died that we might live."

The result—what was it? It was two-fold; first, "The sea ceased from her raging;" then, "The men feared Je-

hovah exceedingly, and offered a sacrifice unto Jehovah, and made vows." For these heathen men the result was a complete and entire turning to the true and living God. Jonah could say of himself, "I fear Jehovah." The Spirit of God records of the sailors, "The men feared Jehovah exceedingly." Then they offered a sacrifice. That tells us of approach to God in God's own way—also, of thanksgiving and worship. How lovely to trace the work of the Spirit of God in the hearts of these men! First, they were "afraid" of the storm, verse 5, and crying to their gods; then, they were "exceedingly afraid" as they heard for the first time, of the God of the heavens, who had made the sea and the dry land. Thirdly, they cried to Jehovah, instead of to their gods; acknowledged His greatness and power, and bowed in submission to His will. Fourthly, they feared Jehovah exceedingly—a very different thing from being "exceedingly afraid." Fifthly, they came into Jehovah's presence with a sacrifice, God's own appointed way, and bowed before Him in worship and thanksgiving; and finally, they made vows—a public acknowledgement of the debt that they owed to the great God whom they had so lately learned to know.

The result for Jonah was far different from what any man could have expected: "And Jehovah prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights." Jehovah's eye was on that parting scene on the deck of that little vessel amidst the storm. Jehovah's eye (an eye and a heart of love and grace) was on His erring servant as he sank under those angry waves; and there where he least expected it, he found a place of refuge—in the belly of the fish. If those dark and stormy waters spoke of death, surely the belly of the fish tells us of the grave. We know that this is so, for our Lord Jesus Christ tells us plainly

that Jonah at this time was a type of Himself. "Even as Jonah was in the belly of the great fish three days and three nights thus shall the Son of Man be in the heart of the earth three days and three nights." (Matt. 12:40) Little did Jonah know the honor that was being put upon him at this moment, in that he was for ever after to be a sign of how his Lord and Master would later on go down voluntarily into death and the grave, in order to save others.

Notice, also, that the Word of God says that God "prepared a great fish." It is true that in the ordinary English Bible, the word "whale" is used in Matthew 12:40, in this connection; yet it is worthy of note that in this passage, the New Translation uses the same word "great fish" as that used in the Book of Jonah. When we shut God out of His own universe we are immediately in difficulties, but when we accept what God says, just as He says it, there is no difficulty whatsoever. God is well able to prepare a great fish, to preserve His servant's life; he is able to have that special fish ready, waiting outside the boat, in exactly the right place, and at just the right time. This is not *one* miracle only, this is a combination of many miracles, and to the one who knows God, and His ways, there is nothing impossible, or even improbable in what happened here, but rather just what we might expect our gracious God to do for one of His own. This great fish is the first thing the book tells us that Jehovah prepared for His servant, but it was by no means the last. The gourd, the worm, and the sultry east wind, were each in turn specially prepared by God, and each one was just as truly a miracle of God, as the great fish.

Before we turn from this first chapter of Jonah, we must notice with adoring wonder, the amazing grace and wisdom of God (not to speak of His power), in turning

the sin and the failure of His disobedient servant to the glory of His own name, and the blessing of His poor creature, man. God had sent Jonah on a message of warning to a Gentile city in the far east, a message that was to prove a message of mercy; but His servant had refused to go, and started westward for a city of the far west. What does God do, but use this very act of disobedience to bring a message of mercy and peace to a ship's company of ignorant heathen sailors? How it reminds us of the verse, "He maketh the wrath of man to praise Him," or again, "We do know that all things work together for good." (Rom. 8:28) Or yet again, "Out of the eater came forth meat, and out of the strong came forth sweetness." (Judges 14:14)

As we meditate on this first chapter of Jonah, and follow the disobedient servant of Jehovah along his pathway from his home in Gath-Hepher, down, down, down, till he reaches the belly of the fish, and thus saves the heathen sailors, we may realize that all this pathway is a picture of the perfect, obedient Servant of Jehovah, our Lord Jesus Christ, who went down, down, down—down from His home in the glory, down to the manger, and from thence down to the cross, and down into the grave, and so saves us poor sinners. How marvelously is that pathway traced for us in Philippians 2:6-8: "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus; who, subsisting in the form of God, did not esteem it an object of rapine to be on an equality with God; but emptied Himself, taking a bondman's form, taking His place in the likeness of men; and having been found in figure as a man, humbled Himself, becoming obedient unto death, and that the death of the cross." Little wonder that the Spirit of God should then burst forth: "Wherefore also God highly exalted Him, and granted Him a name, which is above every

name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of heavenly and earthly and infernal beings, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to God the Father's glory."



CHAPTER TWO

JONAH PRAYS

“And Jonah prayed unto Jehovah his God out of the fish’s belly.” We noticed, when we were considering the first chapter of Jonah, that even when the shipmaster wakened Jonah out of his sleep, and told him to call on his God, that Jonah made no attempt to pray. He was fleeing from the presence of Jehovah, and that is no time to pray unto Him. We saw that he even made a frank confession of his sin to the whole ship’s company, but still he did not pray. We have watched that solemn scene on deck, as the seamen reluctantly took up Jonah, and cast him forth into the sea. It is amazing that even as Jonah was about to die, he apparently made not the slightest attempt to come to God in prayer, though surely there had been a beginning of the restoration of his soul. It often takes some time to bring about full restoration. See Numbers 19:19.

Do not think, dear reader, that Jonah was any worse than we are today. The story before us is only an illustration of how very far from God, even a saint and a prophet, one who has been used of God to do His work, may get. Even the sight of death itself did not break down the barrier that Jonah’s sin and pride had raised between God and his heart. True, the barrier was all on his part, but he would not humble himself to turn to God and cry for mercy.

How wonderful are the ways of God. What the storm, the raging waves, what even death itself, could not accomplish, God now brought about by His own ways. Alone in the belly of the fish, amidst that awful darkness, and that

deathly silence, utterly without hope of deliverance by the hand of man—*Jonah prayed*. "Out of the belly of Sheol (or the grave), cried I." This is the way Jonah described that moment. Worse, far worse to Jonah, than a few short moments under the stormy waves, and then death; were those long hours, three days and three nights, "in the belly of Sheol." The proud, rebellious spirit bowed at last, and Jonah prayed.

Should one of my readers be following Jonah in a course of rebellion and selfwill, too proud and too far from God to pray; just take note of the ways of God with man. Just bear in mind that God can make the proudest spirit bow, and can bring a prayer from the hardest heart. Jonah said: "I cried by reason of my distress unto Jehovah." Honest Jonah—he frankly confessed that it was by reason of his distress that he was finally compelled to cry to God. He could face death without a tremble but there are worse things than death, as he found out. Now such distress came upon him that there was nothing else for it, he must pray. Listen to another (or, indeed, could it be Jonah speaking again?), in Psalm 116:3-4: "The bands (or distresses) of death encompassed me, and the anguish of Sheol took hold of me; I found trouble and sorrow: then called I upon the name of Jehovah: I beseech Thee, Jehovah, deliver my soul." If we persist in walking in the paths of rebellion and selfwill, we may be quite sure that we also will find "trouble and sorrow," such trouble and such sorrow, that it will force us to our knees. O, dear Christian, you who have turned away from the presence of the Lord, who have grown cold and hard, you who have ceased to pray, you who have lost the joys you once possessed in Christ—take warning, and take heart, from Jonah. Listen to the 5th verse of that lovely 116th Psalm, following immediately

after the verses quoted above: "Gracious is Jehovah and righteous; and our God is merciful." Does it not remind you of the very character that Jonah gave of God? Such, you, and I, dear reader, will find our God to be; if *we* will but return, *He* will "abundantly pardon."

Listen again to those words of Jonah: his whole soul seemed filled with wonder that God should have heard and answered such as he, and from such a place!

"I cried by reason of my distress unto Jehovah, and He answered me; out of the belly of Sheol cried I: Thou heardest my voice." Yes, wonder of wonders, God is ever ready to hear, and ever ready to forgive. The cloud and the darkness are all on our side: our God has not changed. One can but watch with adoring wonder to see the patience and wisdom of God in dealing with His erring servant. Time and again He gave him warning and opportunity to cry to Him for pardon and help. God does not give him up, even when the sight of death itself will not force him to yield. This God is our God; how much better for us to fall at His feet and pour out the whole story of our sin and failure, and cry to Him for mercy and forgiveness. We will surely find that, like the writer of Psalm 116 (who had found trouble and sorrow), we too, may exclaim with adoring wonder, "I love the Lord, for He hath heard my voice and my supplications; for He hath inclined His ear unto me, and I will call upon Him during all my days." (Ps. 116:1-2)

But let us listen further to Jonah's prayer. What an immense privilege to be able to stand by and hear this prayer out of the fish's belly:

"For thou didst cast me into the depth, into the heart of the seas." There is not a suggestion that it was the sailors that cast him into the sea: No, Jonah knew better than that. It was God, and God only, who had cast Jonah

into the sea, and he acknowledged it. Why would God do such a thing as this? Was it cruel on His part to do so? Oh, no! This was the way home, and the only way home, for this particular prodigal son. It was not till he got inside the fish, and had been there for three days and nights, that "he came to himself." Whether it is the pigs, or whether it is the fish, God has ways to make His people come to themselves.

"And the flood was round about me: all Thy breakers and Thy billows are gone over me." How these words remind us of the words of our Lord (spoken prophetically, it is true, but yet *His* words), in Psalm 69:1-2, "The waters are come in unto My soul. I sink in deep mire where there is no standing; I am come into the depth of waters and the flood overfloweth Me." We need to ever bear in mind that the Lord Himself tells us that Jonah is a sign, or type, of Himself. The flood was wilder about Him, and there were deeper, darker, more terrible breakers and billows that rolled over His holy soul, as He suffered for sins not His own, but mine and yours.

"And I said, I am cast out from before Thine eyes." Three times in chapter one, we read about Jonah fleeing from the presence of Jehovah; but this is a very different thing. As long as he had his own free choice, Jonah fled from the presence of Jehovah, or sought to do so. Now, alone in the darkness and horror of his awful grave, Jonah said: "I am cast out from before Thine eyes." He had got, so he believed, away from the presence of Jehovah at last, he had found the place he was seeking, but oh, how awful was that place! This was not Jonah deliberately leaving Jehovah, as he fully intended doing; this was, as he thought, Jehovah deliberately leaving him. It is a solemn thing to think, that the day is coming when multitudes around us will be compelled to cry with truth, "I am cast

out from before Thine eyes." They do not want the Lord now, and the day is speedily coming when they will be cast out from His presence, into outer darkness, into weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth. May none of our readers ever share that awful fate: it is worse by far than Jonah's position, and instead of three days and three nights, it will be eternal.

Do not those words remind us of that darkest scene of all eternity when our adorable Lord cried, "Eli, Eli Lama Sabachthani," that is, "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" (Matt. 27:46) God had truly forsaken the One who always did His will, because our sins were laid upon Him, and God is of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look on iniquity. (Hab. 1:13) Such was the cross! Such was the price He paid for you and for me!

"I said, I am cast out from before Thine eyes, yet will I look again toward Thy holy temple." Thank God, it was not true of Jonah. He was not cast out from before the eyes of God. On the contrary, we may plainly see that God's eyes were intently watching His poor servant, even in the belly of that fish, and when the right moment came, we will see that immediately the command went forth to deliver him from his awful prison. Jonah thought he was cast out from before God's eyes. He well knew he deserved to be, but thank God, He does not give His servants their deserts, when they are of this nature.

What is the significance of those words, "I will look again toward Thy holy temple"? Surely Jonah's mind turned back to Solomon's prayer at the dedication of that temple, recorded in 2 Chronicles 6, and no doubt well known to him. Read, for example, verses 38 and 39: "If they return to Thee with all their heart and with all their soul in the land of their captivity . . . and pray toward

their land . . . and toward the city which Thou hast chosen, and toward the house which I have built for Thy name: then hear Thou from the heavens . . . and forgive Thy people which have sinned against Thee." It was on the ground of words such as these that Jonah had authority from the Lord Himself to count on the mercy of God to forgive his sin, and deliver him.

Jonah's eye had been westward, to Tarshish, but *now*, down in the belly of Sheol, there is true repentance, real turning round, and his eyes looked eastward, back to the holy temple that he had lately, so wickedly forsaken. That is just what repentance means. Men often think it means great sorrow for sin. That may, and probably will, be included, but that is not the real meaning of the word. It is *turning round*, the literal meaning is "thinking again." Jonah "thought again." Instead of looking west, he looked east. Instead of turning his *back* to God's holy temple, he turned his *face* to it. Instead of fleeing from the presence of Jehovah, he was seeking His presence. Instead of there being the old, proud, rebellious self that would not pray, even in the most solemn moment—now, he delights to pray; he finds his only comfort and relief in prayer. That tells us of repentance, real, true repentance. I have little doubt that Jonah had very deep sorrow for his sinful course, but he repented, when he turned round, with his back on Tarshish, and his face toward God's holy temple.

"The waters encompassed me, to the soul: the deep was round about me, the weeds were wrapped about my head. I went down to the bottom of the mountains; the bars of the earth closed upon me forever."

Here we find desperate reality. It was not only the waters about him *externally*, but those dark waters of death entered into his very soul. Once again we are re-

mind that Jonah is a type of our Lord Jesus Christ; and do not the verses just quoted tell us something of the sufferings of our blessed Lord, as set forth in Psalm 22? We have noted that the billows and the breakers that went over Him, reminded us of Psalm 69. In this Psalm, the Lord's sufferings from the hand of man seem to be set before us: the *external* sufferings, so to speak. "Thou hast known My reproach, and My shame, and My dishonor: Mine adversaries are all before Thee. Reproach hath broken My heart; and I am full of heaviness: and I looked for some to take pity, but there was none; and for comforters, but I found none. They gave Me also gall for My meat; and in My thirst they gave Me vinegar to drink." (Ps. 69:19-21) All these sufferings were caused by men. As we ponder the fifth and sixth verses of the second chapter of Jonah, we realize that such words, as, "The waters encompassed me, to the soul," tell forth an even deeper suffering, than those external sufferings from man's hand. It reminds us of Joseph (also a wonderful type of our Lord), in Psalm 105:18 (margin and new trans.), "Whose feet they hurt with fetters: his soul came into iron." We see in the first half of the verse, the external suffering that Joseph endured, but in the last half of the verse, we find a deeper and keener suffering that went into the inmost part of his being.

Is it not this side of the suffering of our adorable Lord that we find so wonderfully set before us in Psalm 22? "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" This, the deepest suffering of all, came from God, not from men, though caused by our sins. Some people would tell us that the Lord Jesus only thought that God had forsaken Him, as in Jonah's case: "I said, I am cast out from before Thine eyes." It was, however, very different in the case of our Lord and Savior. There on the cross, He bore our

sins; and with all those mountains of sins upon Him, God must turn away from Him, and it was in very truth that He uttered that awful cry, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" We may, to some small extent (never fully), enter into what it meant to our pure and holy Savior to bear those external sufferings and shame and reproach from man; but no human mind can ever fathom the depth of suffering contained in that terrible cry, "Eli, Eli, Lama Sabachthani?" Here, indeed, the waters compassed Him about, to the soul. It was then He took that awful cup of the wrath of a holy God against sin (the cup you and I deserved to drink), and drank it to its very dregs.

"The depth of all Thy suffering
No heart can e'er conceive;
The cup of wrath o'erflowing,
For us Thou didst receive."

* * * * *

We must notice one more step *down* for poor Jonah. He had gone down of his own accord, down to Joppa, down into the ship, down into the sides of the ship: three sad steps *down*, God had brought him down into the sea, then down into the fish, and now God brings him *down* further still: "I went *down* to the bottoms of the mountains." Now Jonah was down about as far as he could go. It is well for us when we are down. Referring once more to that beautiful 116th Psalm, verse 6, we read, "I was brought low, and He saved me." It is when we are brought down, when our pride is brought low, that He is able to save us. As soon as Jonah got down to the very bottom, he said, "I went down to the bottoms of the mountains; the bars of the earth closed upon me forever;" then, immediately we read, "But Thou hast *brought up* my life from the pit, O Jehovah my God." Jonah's pride was broken;

he was just as low as he could get. It was *then* Jehovah, his God, *brought up* his life from the pit. You, dear Christian reader, have very probably experienced something of this yourself, for "Lo, all these things worketh God oftentimes with man." (Job 33:29) May the Lord help us to humble ourselves truly before Him, so that He may bring us up!

* * * * *

"When my soul fainted within me, I remembered Jehovah: and my prayer came in unto Thee, into Thy holy temple."

In the days of his prosperity, his pride and his selfwill, Jonah had forgotten Jehovah, or perhaps we should say, had disregarded Jehovah, but *now*, when the billows and the breakers were going over him, the waters encompassing him, even to the soul; *now* when he was down at the bottoms of the mountains, when he was utterly without hope, he said, "the bars of the earth closed about me *forever*." *Now*, his soul fainted. He had no resource, no hope in man, there was not one to whom he could turn. *Now*, he remembered Jehovah, *and he prayed*. There was no other hope, no other way, nothing else he could do, so *he prayed*. Not only did he pray, but faith rose from that strange "prayer room," and by faith he could see right into "Thy holy temple," towards which he had looked, and he saw that his prayer had entered in, right inside the veil, to the very presence of God.

Perhaps we all have tasted a bit of this experience of Jonah. Which of us has not tried to manage our own affairs, and when everything went wrong, and we were at our wits' end; when our soul fainted within us, and we had no way, no hope, no plan, then we "remembered Jehovah." Then we prayed. We did not deserve to get a

hearing for our prayer when it was forced from us in such extremities, but, thank God, we have found, like Jonah, that *even then*, it "came in unto Thee, into Thy holy temple."

* * * * *

"They that observe lying vanities (or, vain idols), forsake their own mercy." It may be that Jonah had watched the sailors as they called every man upon his god, bowing down to vain idols, seeking help from them, and offering prayer to them. It may not have affected him much at the time. One gets accustomed to these things. We sing "The heathen in his blindness bows down to wood and stone," and it does not trouble us in the least. Now, in the very presence of Jehovah his God, the very thought of such a thing was utterly abhorrent to Jonah's soul. He saw it all in its true light. He did not say, "It is no matter how they worship, provided they are sincere." No, indeed! He knew full well the awfulness of it, and he cried, "They that observe vain idols forsake their own mercy." Jonah had received such mercy, that the thought of the contrast of those who observe vain idols, instead of remembering the true God, made him realize how very different is the result. Mercy there is for all, provided they turn to Jehovah, but let not any deceive himself by thinking that vain idols, no matter how sincere the worshipper of them, can ever bring mercy to the sinner. What a book of mercy is the book of Jonah! Mercy to Jonah himself, mercy on more than one occasion! Mercy to the seamen, and mercy to man and beast in Nineveh! We can truly say—

"Nothing but mercy will do for me,
Nothing but mercy—full and free;
Of sinners chief—what but the blood
Can calm my soul before my God?"

"But I will sacrifice unto Thee with the voice of thanksgiving: I will pay that which I have vowed."

Faith grew bolder; now Jonah could say that he would yet sacrifice to Jehovah with the voice of thanksgiving. How could he possibly have hoped for this while he was still in the belly of the fish? Only by faith. This sacrifice of thanksgiving is the "peace offering," though it is also called the "thanksgiving offering." It was a voluntary offering of a sweet savor to Jehovah. We read of it in Leviticus 3, and 7:11-21 and 28-36, where in 7:12, we find it is called "the sacrifice of thanksgiving." It is a peculiarly beautiful aspect of the sacrifice of Christ. We find that in this sacrifice, God had first His own special share. The priest that offered it had his own share. Aaron had his own share, and there was a share for Aaron's sons, and the man who offered the sacrifice also had his share. When we offer the sacrifice of thanksgiving, not only does God Himself find sweetness and fragrance in it, having a special portion in it for Himself; but Christ as the High Priest, and Christ as the One who offered Himself, has a portion in that sacrifice also. The family of Aaron, the saints of God down here—they get a portion, too; and the one who has offered the sacrifice of thanksgiving also has a portion in that sacrifice. May we each one be found much more often offering the sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving!

Jonah could say with triumph, even while still down in the belly of the fish, "I will pay that which I have vowed." That is real faith. The sailors also made vows, so that there was a special portion for the Lord both from Jonah and from them; and so the Lord once more made the wrath of man to praise Him. Once again, out of the eater He brought forth meat, and out of the strong He brought forth sweetness. (See Judges 14:4)

There is something peculiarly beautiful to see Jonah's faith grow, while he prayed. Is it not often so? We enter the Lord's presence in prayer often so sad and burdened we can only come with groanings that cannot be uttered, but as we pray, and the eye of faith turns upwards, and pierces through all the waves and billows and storms down here, we can see right into the bright sunshine of His own presence. How many a saint whose soul has been cast down, when he prayed, has been able to fling back in the teeth of the enemy, "*I shall yet praise Him*, who is the health of my countenance, and my God." (Ps. 42:11)

Then comes the climax, so to speak, of the whole prayer. One grand short cry,

"SALVATION IS OF JEHOVAH."

It is a great thing when we learn this. Then we cease from man whose breath is in his nostrils. Shut up to God, without a ray of hope from any other source, there alone in the dark and the stillness, Jonah learned one of the deepest and greatest lessons that any man ever can learn—that is—"Salvation is of Jehovah." May the Lord graciously help you and me, dear reader, to know more, and ever more, of this great lesson: as better and better we learn to know Himself.

* * * * *

What followed this grand and joyful exclamation? What followed when the lesson was learned, and the eye was off self, off man, and turned to Jehovah alone?

"And Jehovah commanded the fish, and it vomited out Jonah upon the dry land." As soon as Jonah really learned that salvation is of Jehovah, then Jehovah brought salvation. And how did He accomplish this salvation? By a word. He spoke and the fish obeyed. We have already seen the stormy wind obeying His word, both in rising,

and in being still. Now we find the great fish equally obedient. The only disobedient one in this book was Jonah, a man, God's highest creation, a man who was God's servant and His prophet; and yet he ventured to disobey. Now Jehovah commanded the fish, and it obeyed. It all reminds us of when Jehovah, as a Man upon earth, could say to the storm, "Peace, be still," or could bring an abundance of fish into Peter's net, or one fish with a piece of money in its mouth, on to Peter's hook. His glories shine forth in the Old Testament and New, alike. He is the same—wondrous grace that *HE* whose glories are so bright and so great, should stoop so low for us!

This word to the fish reminds us of the 29th Psalm, a Psalm with which Jonah was, no doubt, familiar. Perhaps it brought comfort and hope to his soul, when down at the bottoms of those mountains, he recalled that,

"Jehovah sitteth upon the flood; yea, Jehovah sitteth as King forever." (Ps. 29:10) Perhaps we cannot bring our meditations on this wondrous chapter to a close in any more fitting manner than by quoting a few verses from this majestic Psalm:

"The voice of Jehovah is upon the waters: the God of glory thundereth, Jehovah upon great waters. The voice of Jehovah is powerful, the voice of Jehovah is full of majesty. The voice of Jehovah breaketh cedars; yea, Jehovah breaketh the cedars of Lebanon: and He maketh them to skip like a calf, Lebanon and Sirion like a young buffalo. The voice of Jehovah cleaveth out flames of fire. The voice of Jehovah shaketh the wilderness; Jehovah shaketh the wilderness of Kadesh. The voice of Jehovah maketh the hinds to calve, and layeth bare the forests; and in His temple doth every one say, Glory!"

"Jehovah sitteth upon the flood; yea, Jehovah sitteth as King for ever. Jehovah will give strength unto His people; Jehovah will bless His people with peace."

It is the voice of this glorious One—His voice as Good Shepherd—that we have learned to know and love. Help us, Good Shepherd, to ever follow Thee, to ever hear Thy voice!



CHAPTER THREE

JONAH PREACHES

Scripture is often silent when we wish that it would speak. Such a time is the gap (if we may use such a word), between the second and third chapters of Jonah. How much we would like to know *where* the great fish vomited out Jonah? Did he return home to Gath-Hepher after his strange and sad experience? Did the command from God, given a second time, come immediately after Jonah was vomited out of the fish, or was there a space, perhaps a considerable space, of time? None of these questions we can answer; and it is idle for us to ask them, much as we would like to know about these things. We do know that God has told us in His Word all that we need to know, and we often can learn from the silence of Scripture as well as from that which it reveals to us.

Perhaps in this instance our gaze is the more steadily kept on God's determined purpose to send a warning to the great and wicked city of Nineveh. The failure of man, even the failure of God's own servants, cannot deter the Lord in His purposes of grace. What comfort there is for our souls in this thought. Not that it should make us careless, far from it. Jonah should surely have learned that lesson. On the contrary it should give us a deeper and fuller confidence in the One whom we trust and serve, as we realize that the work is His, and depends on Himself, and He will surely bring about His purposes. Even though we may fail, He faileth not!

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"And the word of Jehovah came unto Jonah the second time, saying, Arise, go to Nineveh, the great city, and

preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee." (Jonah 3:1)

We may well believe that Jonah was in a very humbled frame of mind as he found himself vomited out on the beach, and once more safe on dry ground. We may have little doubt that he was very ready to pay that which he had vowed to sacrifice? Was his vow that he would go where God sent him? We cannot answer these questions. As we recall the case of John Mark in the New Testament, another servant of the Lord who turned aside from the service which he had received; and as we bear in mind that *he* was, apparently, laid aside from that service for possibly twenty years, it makes us realize more fully the seriousness of Jonah's actions in the eyes of his Master.

For us, who perhaps also have turned aside from some service that has been given to us, we may find in the first verse of the third of Jonah, a rich mine of comfort. Even suppose the mercy of God had delivered His failing servant from the awful death that threatened him, who could expect that the Lord would give to him a second opportunity to carry out this service, which he had once been privileged to have the opportunity of doing for Him. Such is the grace of God. Not only did the Lord save His servant from death, but He patiently taught him the lessons that he needed, and then saved and pardoned and equipped more fully than before through these new lessons, once more the Lord sent him on the very message that he had formerly refused.

I cannot but think that the unspeakable grace of God shown to him again in this re-commission, must have touched the heart of Jonah. I cannot but think that many times the thought must have gone through his mind, amidst his deep repentance, "Oh, how gladly would I show the reality of my repentance by once again having the opportunity to go on the message that I once refused."



"Jonah...cried... Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown."

Mark, the failing servant, became the profitable servant: and Jonah the disobedient servant, became the obedient one. The Master in both cases received them back, and once again gave to them the opportunity of continuing in that service that they had once refused. I cannot but think that most of the servants of the same blessed Master today may take comfort and hope and encouragement from these two failing servants we have been considering.

The message is very much the same. Before it had been,

“Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before Me.”

Now the message is,

“Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee.”

The message is a little more peremptory, without the explanation of the reason for the warning, as given at first. The prophet had shown himself unworthy of that intimacy of communion that the first command contained. It was something like Psalm 103:7: “He made known His ways unto Moses, His acts unto the children of Israel.” The first message told of God’s “ways,” and gave the reason for His “acts.” The second time, there was no such explanation given, and simple, implicit obedience is what is called for. This was right. It was in simple, implicit obedience that the prophet had failed: and the second opportunity offered to him is a test of whether he would obey, without being told the reason.

How important for us are the last words of that first verse: “Preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee.” How often those of us who preach are tempted to preach what *we* like. Perhaps the Lord has in the past blessed certain subjects, and we like to preach from these, instead of listening to hear what He may bid us preach. There

are those who have certain subjects that they use over and over again: it saves that exercise of soul, perhaps, that new subjects would require. There are others who make it a boast that they never preach the same sermon twice. How different from Jonah, who only had one sermon, and preached it over and over again for days on end. "The preaching that I bid thee" sums it all up for every preacher today. May the Lord give to us that quiet, hearing ear that is ready listening for His bidding as to the subject, as well as His bidding as to the place!

"So Jonah arose, and went unto Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord." (Jonah 3:3)

There was no hesitating now. There was no question now as to whether he wanted to go or not. He received his orders to go, and he went. That is as it should be. He does not say, as we are sometimes tempted, "I have not the ability: I am not worthy of such a high and holy task: I have so grievously failed in the past, send someone else." Even a Moses could have thoughts such as these, but they were not pleasing to God, nor did they honor Him, or show true humility on the part of the servant. "He that speaketh of himself seeketh his own glory," and actually "self" is the one on whom our eyes and thoughts are fixed in all such excuses. We need to have our eye on God alone. If *He* sends us, all is well; then we may gladly go without a fear or a question; but woe to the one who runs unsent. The Lord must say of other prophets: "I have not sent these prophets, yet they ran: I have not spoken to them, yet they prophesied." (Jer. 23:21) Let us beware of such work done in the name of the Lord! We all need to take the warning home to ourselves.

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"Now Nineveh was an exceeding great city of three days journey." (ch. 3:3) "It was a city of vast extent and

population; and was the centre of the principle commerce of the world. Its wealth was not, however, altogether derived from trade. It was a 'bloody city,' 'full of lies and robbery' (Nahum 3:1). It plundered the neighboring nations; and is compared by the prophet Nahum to a family of lions which 'fill their holes with prey and their dens with ravin' (chap. 2:11-12). At the same time it was strongly fortified; its colossal walls, a hundred feet high, with their fifteen hundred towers, bidding defiance to all enemies." (Bible Handbook, Angus.) It was said to be about sixty miles in circumference.

"And Jonah began to enter into the city a day's journey, and he cried, and said, Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown." (chap. 3:4)

The long and trying journey from Canaan to Nineveh is all passed over. We know it took Ezra five months to make a very similar journey (Ezra 7:9), and we may gather that Jonah was a somewhat similar length of time on his journey. Every detail of it is omitted, indeed it is not even mentioned; it is as though the Spirit of God has one object alone before Him, and that is to tell of the warning sent to the city of Nineveh; the servant and his experiences are all kept out of sight.

We may follow Jonah as he enters that great city. The marvelous palace, the winged bulls, and other wonders of that ancient city, are not just old fables—we may see them today in the museums of the world. The picture of the winged bull in the illustration of Jonah preaching, is a photograph of a drawing of the very same bull that we may suppose that Jonah looked upon, and under whose shadow he may have preached. Jonah was a brave man to walk through that great city, crying out his sole warning of destruction. Watch him as he walked down the streets crying, "Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown."

The crowd will surely gather, and perhaps he stops on some nearby doorstep, and raised above them, he solemnly repeats that dread message from God, "Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown." We know not if he added that part told him in the first message he had received, "for their wickedness is come up before me;" but we do know that the people of Nineveh recognized the justice and the seriousness of the message: they thoroughly understood that their sins were the cause of the coming overthrow. There was no lightness, there was no mocking or persecution of this strange man. Did his face bear the marks of those three days in the fish's belly? Undoubtedly it did, and we may have little doubt that those days had left their imprint on his whole demeanor. There could be no trifling after such an experience. There was no effort to make his preaching attractive to his audience; no need of music or of oratory; no need of a fine building in which to preach. His sermon was perhaps, the shortest ever preached, but the most effective: a whole city was converted by it. His preaching hall was the streets of Nineveh, and his roof the canopy of heaven; but *all*, from the king on his throne to the very beasts of the city, heard and were affected by it. Oh, that we modern preachers were more like Jonah in our deportment; perhaps if we entered more deeply into what it means to be dead with Christ, and risen with Him, it would show forth more in our ways—yes, in our very faces: and our message might carry more weight than it often seems to do now.

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It is a remarkable thing that there was in Nineveh an old tradition of a strange messenger who on several occasions had appeared from the gods, coming from out of the sea. The messenger of this story was probably the origin

of the idol Dagon, which had the head of a man and the lower portion, was a fish. (See 1 Sam. 5:4, margin.) The Hebrew word "Dagon" means a fish. Although this idol was worshipped among the Philistines, it originated in all probability, in Assyria, of which Nineveh was the capital. It is possible that God permitted this story, which was probably well known, to incline the hearts of the people of Nineveh to hearken to the prophet who had so lately, and in such an extraordinary manner, come from the sea. (See Nineveh and its remains, by A. H. Layard.)

We may see a modern example of how God has used old traditions to work out His purposes of blessing, in the case of the Karen tribe of Burma, who were taught to expect "their younger white brother" to bring back to them a long lost book. When it came they were instructed to receive both it and those who brought it. This was one of the causes that led to so many Karens to become Christians.

"And the people of Nineveh believed God ("believed *in* God," Newberry), and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them to the least of them. And the word reached the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, and laid his robe from him, and covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes." (chap. 3:5-6)

What glorious verses! What a magnificent result to that short sermon! It all came because the people of Nineveh "believed in God." They took Him at His Word. Would that the people of China, and people of Britain and the people of the other lands would do the same thing today! Alas, the most solemn messages from God today are passed by without heed, and thrown aside as if they were of no importance. The sad, sad truth today is that the people do not believe God, and do not believe in Him or in His Word. This solemn message to Nineveh was the first of three warnings that God sent to them. The second, by

Nahum, perhaps some hundred and fifty years later; and the third by Zephaniah some years after Nahum, were both disregarded by this proud and mighty city. We know that the judgment, so long threatened, yet so long delayed, did at last fall, with all the terrible fulness so minutely foretold in Scripture.

Is this a little picture of the Gentile cities of today? How many warnings has God in His grace sent to our guilty lands; and how little have we copied the people of Nineveh! Would that today the cities of Europe, Asia and America would believe God, believe His Word, and turn to Him as the king and people of that mighty heathen city long ago! Just as surely as this simple faith in the people of Nineveh brought deliverance to their city, so surely would true faith in God, and turning to Him, bring deliverance today. We need not be ashamed of believing God. We certainly should be ashamed of *not* believing Him. The fasting, the sackcloth, the ashes were nothing to be ashamed of. It was their sins of which they should be ashamed. Thank God for the days of prayer that certain rulers call for in the different nations. Were those days of prayer accompanied by the deep, deep repentance and humiliation so plainly seen at Nineveh, how much greater the deliverance that God would delight to give to us.

I love to watch the king of Nineveh. See how he received the message which that strange foreigner had been preaching all day in his city; "Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown!" Would this strange prophet lose his head for such impertinence? Far from it. The king believed the message. Watch how he came down from his throne with bowed head. He knew very well that he and his people had merited this judgment. See how he laid aside his robe, and took off his crown. We know that one

sinner that repenteth brings joy in the presence of the angels of God, and what joy the conduct of that heathen king, whose name we do not even know, must have brought in heaven on that day. Nor was it the king alone. It was "the men of Nineveh," as well. How many we cannot tell, but we do know that there were a hundred and twenty thousand little children, too young to know their right hand from their left. Even these little ones put on sackcloth. What joy must there have been in heaven to see those hundreds of thousands in Nineveh fasting, and clothed in sackcloth, to show forth the depth of their repentance before God! Oh, that today our rulers, and we, their people, might follow the example of Nineveh!

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Nor was that all: Listen to this great and wise king—

"And he caused it to be proclaimed and published throughout Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying, Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything: let them not feed; nor drink water; and let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily unto God; and let them turn every one from his evil way, and from the violence that is in their hands. Who knoweth but that God will turn and repent, and will turn away from His fierce anger, that we perish not?"

The sackcloth and the fasting were good as showing forth the reality of their deep repentance; but of even greater importance in the sight of God must have been that admonition from the king, "Let them turn every one from his evil way, and from the violence that is in their hands." This mighty work in Nineveh started with faith: but faith without works is dead. These people of Nineveh had the right order: first faith, then works. Had they not believed God, they never would have repented. Faith wrought repentance. What is repentance? It means "think-

ing again," it tells us the very same story that we have just read in the book of Jonah. The people, in the old days, had been quite satisfied to go on in their usual wicked course—"no worse than others," perhaps they would have said; but when they heard of destruction just ahead, they believed it. In the light of coming judgment, they saw their conduct in all its awfulness, as God saw it. There was no excusing of themselves; but on the contrary they took sides with God against themselves. That is what repentance really is.

First came *faith*, then *repentance*, and the depth and reality of the repentance was shown forth by the fasting, the sackcloth and the ashes, from the greatest to the least. Yes, even the beasts wore sackcloth in Nineveh during those days, and God takes note of the beasts in giving Jonah His reasons for showing mercy to the guilty city.

Then after *repentance*, rather perhaps should we say, *part of the repentance*, came that wondrous turning from their evil way, coupled with the command "Let them cry mightily unto God." The cry of Sodom and Gomorrah, God said, was great (Gen. 18:20), but it was a cry that brought down judgment. How different was this mighty cry that went up from nearly a million hearts and tongues in Nineveh. What music must that cry have been in heaven! You will recall that it was by no means the first "cry" for help of which we read in this little book. We have already seen the heathen sailors cry to their false gods, and we have seen how useless was such a cry. We have seen them tell Jonah to call on his God, "if so be that God will think upon us, that we perish not." (chap. 1:6) We have heard Jonah himself say, "I cried by reason of mine affliction unto Jehovah, and He heard me" (chap. 2:2), and again, "My prayer came in unto Thee, into Thine holy temple." chap. 2:7)



"The king arose from his throne...and covered him with sackcloth."

We have heard these same heathen sailors cry mightily, not on their false gods, not even on Jonah's God as an unknown Being, but we heard that bitter cry, "We beseech Thee, O Jehovah, we beseech Thee, let us not perish for this man's life, and lay not upon us innocent blood: for *Thou*, Jehovah, hast done as it pleased Thee." (chap. 1:14) Every one of these cries was heard, and all were abundantly answered. Shall that mighty cry from Nineveh, from the king and all his subjects, be disregarded? Impossible! God's Word, in both Old and New Testaments, says, "Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved." (Joel 2:32, quoted in Romans 10:13.) Listen again: "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let them return unto the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon." (Isaiah 55:7) What a bright illustration the city of Nineveh gives to us of this verse; and how true would the peoples who are in such distress today find these words, if they would but put them to the test!

"And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, that He said that He would do unto them; and He did it not." (Jonah 3:10)

"God saw their works." "Faith without works is dead." (James 2:26) Did God not first see their faith? Surely He did, but the *works* were the visible evidence to all men of their faith. We all might take good heed to this verse. Too often we are content to say, "I have faith" (see James 2:14), and the question God asks is this, "What profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? Can faith save him?" I believe that every one of us might do well to see to it that we have *works*, to show forth our *faith*. Romans and Galatians make it per-

fectly clear that a man is justified in the sight of God by faith, not by works. "By the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in His sight." (Romans 3:20) "To him that worketh not, but believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness." (Romans 4:5) "A man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ." (Gal. 2:16)

The book of James is equally inspired by God, and makes it perfectly clear that *there must be works*, not in order to justify or save us (that is done by faith alone); but because true faith always produces fruit that is shown forth in works. I was returning home from work one evening, when I saw flames coming out of the roof of a house on a small side street. I rushed over to the house, ran down the garden path, and without even waiting to knock at the door, ran in and shouted, "Your house is on fire!" A man came leisurely downstairs with a cigarette in his mouth, stared at me, and asked me what I was making all that fuss about in his house. I said again, "Your house is on fire!" but he paid not the least attention, and evidently thought I was a lunatic. He had no faith. A few minutes later, when he discovered I had spoken the truth, he was tremendously excited. Then works showed forth his faith. Had he believed my words when first I told him, had he had *faith* then, he would have been tremendously excited immediately. The lack of works proved that he had no faith.

So it is today. Men are perishing on every hand. They go to "church," they have Bibles in their homes, and profess to believe in God, but by works they deny Him. They have no real faith. If they had, it would most certainly be shown forth by their works. "For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also. (James 2:26) "Ye see then how that by works a man is

justified, and not by faith only." (James 2:24) A man can be justified in the sight of his fellowmen by works only, for no man can see into the heart of another. So men can judge whether there is true faith, only by his works. Jonah 3:10 is an illustration of a city that is justified (from man's point of view) in *God's sight*, by their works. God, Himself, gives us other examples, as Abraham and Rahab.

In these days, through God's infinite grace, a full and clear gospel, through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ alone, is often preached. We can thank and praise God for it; but we fear that at times, the balance of truth is not always kept, and we are apt to forget that with us, it should be as in Abraham's case, "faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect." (James 2:22) Please be absolutely clear, it is not that we are saved partly by faith and partly by works. No, we are saved by *faith alone*, faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. But if there is true faith, then it is utterly impossible not to have works. The works are merely the external result, of the internal faith. The faith saves us. The works give evidence that we truly have the faith.

How beautifully all this is illustrated in the story of Nineveh and her king. Speaking reverently, it would have been utterly impossible for God to do other than show mercy to that great, guilty city, when her works spoke so loudly of the faith which produced them.

So, whether it be an individual, a city, or a nation, if there be a true turning to God, as there was in Nineveh, it is impossible that God should do otherwise than have mercy, and "abundantly pardon." Otherwise, He would not be true to His character—"Thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest Thee of the evil."

CHAPTER FOUR

JONAH IS VERY ANGRY

We have followed the delightful work of God's Spirit dealing with men in this little book, and turning them completely round. We have seen the heathen sailors turned from their idols to the true and living God. We have seen the selfwilled and disobedient prophet turned from his journey westwards to Tarshish, and made ready and willing to go in the opposite direction to Nineveh. We have seen the king and people of Nineveh turn from their wicked ways, and in deep humiliation and repentance seek the God who had sent Jonah to them.

The three lovely chapters we have considered are like an invitation from the Lord Himself to *us*, saying, "Rejoice with me, for I have found that which I had lost." If our hearts are at all in tune with the joys of heaven, what can we do but mightily rejoice to see so many sinners repenting?

Then comes the fourth chapter. It seems to be so terribly "out of tune," that, to the natural mind, it might seem altogether out of place, and an utterly wrong ending to such a book. These are the thoughts of nature; and as we ponder this brief chapter with which our book closes, surely we are compelled to confess that the grace of God, with which this whole book glistens, shines out here almost more brilliantly than in any other part. May the Lord open our eyes to see Himself, as we ponder these last few verses of this lovely story!

As we have noted, the chapters that have passed before our view have been like a call from the Lord Himself to rejoice with Him over repenting sinners. Of all those who

are called to share this joy of heaven, we would think that none would have rejoiced like the prophet Jonah himself. We would expect his mouth to have been filled with laughter and his tongue with singing, as he saw the grace of God—that grace that turned his very sin to such blessing, that a whole ship's company turned to the Lord. Then, in spite of all his failure, the Lord honored His servant, by letting him be the means of turning the whole of a great city to the true and living God. Surely he should have been a happy man! Such was not the case, however.

“And it *displeased* Jonah *exceedingly*, and he was *very angry*.” “Displeased exceedingly, and very angry,” what a condition for a prophet of Jehovah, one who had just been the instrument in the hand of Jehovah for such a mighty work! With whom was he so exceedingly displeased? With whom was he very angry? Sad, sad to say, it was with Jehovah Himself. Why was he so displeased and so angry? It was because Jehovah had not destroyed the city of Nineveh, because Jehovah had shown grace and mercy to these repenting sinners.

If ever a man had needed the grace and mercy of Jehovah it was Jonah himself, down in the belly of the great fish. He had been shown that grace and mercy, but now he was unwilling that others should receive what he himself had so mightily needed, and had so freely been given.

It reminds us of the elder son in Luke 15. “He was angry and would not go in.” Angry with whom? Angry with his father. Why was he so angry with his father? Because he had received back his repentant brother, and not said a word about his sins—he had shown grace and mercy, instead of judgment. So the elder brother was angry and would not go in. He may have meant to insult his brother, but in reality it was his father whom he insulted.

Beloved friends, do we not see a picture of ourselves in these two men? Have you not known of a brother who has been angry and would not go to the meeting, because of something of which he did not approve? He may have meant to show that he was exceedingly displeased and very angry with one of his brethren, but in reality the insult is toward his Lord. Who is the Centre? Who is the attraction at the meeting? Is it our brethren, or is it the Lord?

The whole scene is so sad and so strange, and yet when we look at our own hearts, we know very well that this sad fourth chapter of Jonah is absolutely true to life. Jonah felt that his reputation as a prophet was gone. He had foretold that in forty days Nineveh would be overthrown, and now God had repented of the evil that He said He would do, and He did it not, and Jonah's word had not come true. How often have we been displeased and angry and sulky (just like Jonah), over something that God Himself has allowed in our lives, which we feel has affected our reputation? With my eyes on myself, away from God, how very large "I" become in my own sight.

Listen to Jonah's prayer, and count the number of times he speaks of himself: "And he prayed unto Jehovah, and said, 'Ah, Jehovah, was not this *my* saying when *I* was yet in *my* country? Therefore *I* was minded to flee at first unto Tarshish; for *I* knew that Thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great loving kindness, and repentest Thee of the evil. And now, Jehovah, take, *I* beseech Thee, *my* life from *me*, for it is better for *me* to die than to live'." *Nine* times he speaks of himself. How the prophet here again reminds us of the elder brother in Luke 15: "Behold, so many years *I* serve thee, and never have *I* transgressed a commandment of thine; and to *me* hast thou never given a kid that *I* might make

merry with *my* friends." The same object is before them both—self, that hateful self, that self that ever remains with writer and reader and Jonah alike.

One would have thought that such experiences as those through which Jonah had so lately passed would have "eradicated" the old nature (as some would have us believe). Alas! The old nature was just as strong in Jonah as ever it had been, and it comes out in a fit of bad-temper, such as you and I have very likely experienced in ourselves. It comes out to tell us with all the force and weight of God's own Word, that the doctrine of the eradication of the old nature, the doctrine of "sinless perfection," is nothing but a myth, a lie of the devil, to deceive men. If ever a man should have had the old Jonah die, and only the new Jonah live, it was our prophet; but the fourth chapter lets us see that the old Jonah was just as much alive as he ever was. If we are honest, we have to confess that the same is true of us. Jonah is a mighty witness to the truth of the word, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves." (1 John 1:8)

"It displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was very angry. And he prayed." Displeasure and anger do not make a very good beginning to prayer, so perhaps we need not wonder when we hear what he prayed. Though he addressed his words to God, it is only too evident that his eyes were on himself, and on what he fancied were his wrongs. You will remember that this is not the first prayer of Jonah to which we have listened. How different was this prayer, from the one sent up to God from the belly of the great fish! At that time his eyes were toward God's holy mountain. He was looking away from self to God, but now he was looking away from God to self. It may be that we have prayed in a very similar state of mind. It may be that we have gone to God to complain or to accuse,

instead of to beseech. It may be that instead of lifting up our eyes to heaven, as our Lord did when He prayed (John 17:1), we have turned our eyes down to ourselves, or around to our brethren, and the sights that we see in either case almost surely make us displeased and angry.

Let us look for a moment at Jonah's prayer. Surely it was only grace that could call it a *prayer*, for we will see that there was little about it that conformed to a true prayer. He begins: "Ah, Jehovah, was not this my saying when I was yet in my country?" This is a question, not a prayer—and a question put to Jehovah in order to justify himself for the very sin and disobedience that had already brought such terrible chastisement on him, and of which we thought he had truly repented. Then note these words, "My saying . . . *my* country." Can we not see the pride of self and pride of country, just sticking out here? Are we any better? Which of us does not naturally like to speak of himself, and repeat "my saying," tell what *I* have said, and prove that *I* was right? It might have been one of us speaking, instead of Jonah the prophet: only then we would not be so hard on the speaker. And Jonah had quite forgotten that, after all, the country was God's country, and not his. The Lord had definitely said, of that particular country, "The land is mine." (Lev. 25:23)

What was it that Jonah had said in "my country"? Why was he minded to flee unto Tarshish? He tells us himself: "For I knew that Thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great loving kindness, and repentest Thee of the evil." What a glorious character! and how true it was, and is! Yes, truly Jonah knew his God. You will recall that another could say, "I feared thee, because thou art an austere man." (Luke 19:21) How little did this servant know his Master! Jonah was a true servant of the Lord, and truly knew his Master's character.

This was before he set out for Tarshish at all. One is inclined to think that Jonah had had experiences of the Lord's grace and mercy to himself, even before he had tasted of it so very deeply in the belly of the fish. The disobedient, rebellious and sulky nature of the prophet may have manifested itself before the days of which this little book tells us, and the prophet had learned deeply and truly to know his Master and Lord. It is good that we should know Him thus; it gives us a confidence in Him, and brings us back to Him in shame and sorrow, even as this same knowledge of his Master brought Peter back to Him. We will never be disappointed in Him, when we come back to Him, pleading this character no matter how great the sin and the failure. Ponder those five characteristics, and let them sink down deeply into our hearts:

"A gracious God,
and merciful,
slow to anger,
and of great loving-kindness,
and repentest Thee of the evil."

And "This God is our God for ever and ever." (Ps. 48:14)

One marvels that Jonah should wish to flee from the presence of such a God, instead of enjoying the sunshine of His love and favor. Why should he wish to escape from Him? It would seem that he well knew that if the guilty city of Nineveh should repent, that the Lord would also repent of the evil, and not do it. On the one hand, "my saying" as to the destruction of the city would not come true, and Jonah's reputation as a prophet be affected. And on the other hand, it may well be that Jonah's eye looked down the years, and saw that before so very long, "my country" would be desolated by the very city he now hoped to see destroyed. They are both motives that touch us very closely: loss of reputation and loss of our country

would carry very great weight with almost every one of us, and move us to do strange things indeed.

So we see that Jonah's displeasure, and his anger, were caused by God's abundant mercy, and because God did not bring a terrible punishment on a rival nation, whom Jonah wished to see destroyed. If we are honest, I suppose that most of us know full well that in our own hearts we have been guilty of the very same thoughts with regard to nations that are rivals of our own.

Perhaps we should make a remark on what Jonah says of God: "Thou . . . *repentest* Thee of the evil." We have already pointed out that *repentance* in man means to "think again," or a change of thought or a change of mind. In another place in Scripture (1 Samuel 15:29), we read: "The Hope of Israel will not lie nor repent; for He is not a man, that He should repent." What then does Jonah mean when he says "Thou . . . *repentest* Thee of the evil"? It does not mean a change of mind on God's part, but a change of action caused by a change of mind on man's part. God sends warnings to man, in order that man may change his mind, may repent, so that God may change His action from judgment to mercy. God has not changed His mind. God's mind has ever been toward mercy: "Thou art a gracious God, and merciful;" but man's sin must bring down the righteous judgment of God, even though He is slow to anger. There is only one way of escape, and that is by repentance on the part of sinful man. With this object in view God sends warnings to individuals and to nations. If they hear and repent, then God may act according to the desires of His heart, and show mercy. If man will not repent, there is no other way, and judgment must fall.

Let us look further at Jonah's prayer. He continues: "And now, Jehovah, take, I beseech Thee, my life from

me, for it is better for me to die than to live." This is the only request in Jonah's prayer, a request that he might die. Why? Because he could not have his own way. Selfwill and disappointment made him long to give up his honorable position as prophet and servant of Jehovah, a witness to Him, even in a foreign land; and escape all his troubles in death. It was very wrong and very cowardly—just the kind of thing *we* do. When things go all wrong, and we do not get our own way, and are disappointed and discouraged; then we sigh, and hope that the Lord may soon come and take us away to heaven. The writer has to confess that he has done just the same thing as Jonah, and very possibly the reader is little better. If we allow it, how the sword of the Spirit cuts us, and how truly it is "a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." (Hebrews 4:12)

Jonah is not the only prophet of Jehovah who in a fit of disappointment had prayed that he might die. You remember Elijah had prayed, "It is enough: now, Jehovah, take my life; for I am not better than my fathers." (1 Kings 19:4) We, too, have had similar thoughts when we have been utterly disappointed with ourselves. How different if all our hopes had been in our Lord, and we had truly learned the lesson that "in me, that is, in my flesh, is no good thing."

How gracious is Jehovah, whether to Jonah, or to Elijah, or to us! He might well have sharply rebuked Jonah for such a prayer as that, or for coming into His presence in displeasure and anger. How gracious is His reply to another question, too: "Doest thou well to be angry?" Jonah did the very best thing he could have done—he was silent. His mouth was closed. How graciously the Lord answered Elijah's prayer! This time the Lord was silent, and instead of a reply in words, He gave him sweet re-

freshing sleep under a broom-bush, and then fed him with a cake baked on hot stones. Was it baked by the same One who prepared the fish on the fire of coals, and the bread, in John 21? He refreshed him with a cruse of water also. That prayer of Elijah's was never answered, for in place of taking away his life in death, as he had wished, the Lord took him home without passing through death at all, in His own chariot of fire. How gently and graciously the Lord has answered *us* in *our* times of disappointment and discouragement, giving us better than all we could ask or think, each one may bear witness for himself! but we can all unite in singing:

“How good is the God we adore,
Our faithful, unchangeable Friend,
Whose love is as great as His power,
And knows neither measure nor end.”

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“And Jonah went out of the city, and sat on the east side of the city” (that was the side farthest from the land of Israel), “and there made him a booth, and sat under it in the shade, till he might see what would become of the city.” I suppose about the worst thing we can do after we have finished preaching is to go and settle ourselves down as comfortably as we can, doing nothing, while we wait to see what the results may be. Our place is to deliver God's message, leave the results with Him, and pass on to other service for the same blessed Master.

The grace of God still followed the selfwilled prophet. “And Jehovah Elohim prepared a gourd, and made it to come up over Jonah, that it might be a shade over his head, to deliver him from his trouble.”

How very gracious and kind of Jehovah to do this! He always knows our frame and ever remembers that we are dust. He deigns to minister to our physical needs,

whether rest and food for Elijah, or shade for Jonah. Notice, it was Jehovah Elohim Himself who prepared this gourd. Perhaps this would tell not only of His faithful loving-kindness, but also of His power. It was not the first thing Jehovah had prepared for His erring servant. He had prepared the "great fish." He had sent forth the "great wind," and now He prepared a gourd. Great things and small things are alike to our God. He can prepare the one as easily as the other. How often are we tempted to say in our hearts that such and such a thing is too great to expect God to do it for us, even if we may have learned to trust Him about the little things. Again, we may have learned to know that our God is able and willing to work in our behalf in the "great" things, but we would be ashamed to expect our God to be interested in a gourd—that is too trifling a thing! It is a blessed lesson to learn that all are alike to Him.

"And Jonah was exceeding glad because of the gourd." Not only was he "glad," but he was "exceeding glad" because of the gourd, as he had been "exceedingly displeased" because of God's mercy. How we delight in those temporal mercies that add to our ease and comfort! The luxuries of the present day are often to us what Jonah's gourd was to him—the cause of exceeding gladness.

"But God prepared a worm when the morning rose the next day, and it smote the gourd, that it withered." Whether a whale or a worm, the same word is used. God "prepared" them both. As we see those things which have added to our ease and pleasure, fade and die; we may do well to consider whether it is our own loving God who Himself has prepared the worm to make them pass away. We may learn lessons in adversity, in scorching suns, in poverty and want, that we never could have learned in prosperity and ease and luxury.

There was worse to come—a withered gourd and a tropical sun were bad enough; but now God prepared something more. “And it came to pass, when the sun arose, that God prepared a sultry east wind; and the sun beat upon the head of Jonah, so that he fainted.” God had only “sent out” the “great wind” into the sea, but this “sultry east wind” was specially prepared by the hand of God Himself, to teach a lesson Jonah might otherwise never have learned. The vehemence and the sultriness of that wind had been weighed and measured by God’s own hand. We *too* may learn a lesson here, that some of those things that we call “misfortunes” are specially *prepared* for us by the hand of God Himself. Though it is true (as we may see in the case of Job) that Satan also may send trouble and disaster and loss, that Satan also may cause a “great wind” (Job 1:19), yet whether it be Job, or whether it be one of us, we may take all these things from the hand of God. We may always remember that it is true that “all things work together for good to those who love God,” (Rom. 8:28). It is also true that “all things are for your sakes” (2 Corinthians 4:15), and we may always say, “all things are of God.” (2 Corinthians 5:18) So Jonah himself bore witness that it was God Himself who prepared both the worm and the sultry east wind: and we may well believe that the time came when he accepted both from God’s loving hand, and thanked Him for them.

It is perhaps worthy of note to see how God’s activity in this little book is described:

“The word of Jehovah came unto Jonah. . .” (chap. 1:1)

“Jehovah sent out a great wind . . .” (chap. 1:4)

“Jehovah prepared a great fish . . .” (chap. 1:7)

“Jehovah commanded the fish, and it vomited out Jonah . . .” (chap. 2:10)

"The word of Jehovah came unto Jonah the second time..." (chap. 3:1)

"God (Elohim) saw their works..." (chap. 3:10)

"God (Elohim) repented of the evil..." (chap. 3:10)

"Jehovah said, Doest thou well to be angry?" (chap. 4:4)

"Jehovah God (Elohim) prepared a gourd..." (chap. 4:6)

"God (Elohim) prepared a worm..." (chap. 4:7)

"God (Elohim) prepared a sultry east wind..." (chap. 4:8)

"God (Elohim) said to Jonah, Doest thou well to be angry?" (chap. 4:9)

"Jehovah said, Thou hast pity on the gourd..." (chap. 4:10)

We cannot leave the subject of what God *prepared* for Jonah, without mention of another place specially prepared by the Lord Himself, which we doubt not Jonah also will share. The Lord Jesus said: "In my Father's house there are many abodes; were it not so, I had told you: for I go to prepare you a place." When at home in the Father's house, we look back over the wilderness pathway, we will then recognize many a thing and many a circumstance that the Lord has specially prepared for us. I suppose that Jonah did not realize at the time that the great fish and the gourd and the worm and sultry east wind had each in turn been specially *prepared* for him. I suspect he thought they had just "happened."

We believe it was Jonah's own hand that wrote the little book that bears his name, for we cannot suppose it was any other: it would not be like Jonah's Master to allow another servant to so openly disclose the faults and failings of a fellow-servant. If this be so, we may see how deeply Jonah learned, before the end of his journey, to

take all these things from the hand of God; and what gratitude must have risen up in his heart at the tender care of his God for him. Who else would take the trouble specially to prepare a worm on purpose for himself, to teach himself a greatly needed lesson? So, I suppose, at the end of our journey, when we reach the place our Lord is preparing for us, our hearts will rise up in gratitude, not alone for that prepared place, but for all His tender care along the way, for the worms, or what we now term the "misfortunes," as well as for the gourds, or what we now call "the blessings"—both alike, are specially *prepared* for us. Then we will be able to say, He led us by the skilfulness of His hands (Psalm 78:72), and with wonder and thanksgiving we will admire the things those skilful hands are preparing for us now.

That sultry east wind was the last straw for Jonah. He fainted. It was not the first time that Jonah had fainted. Down in the fish's belly, he tells us, his soul had fainted within him (chap. 2:7). Then he remembered Jehovah. It is so with us, very often. As long as we have our own strength on which to lean, we do not remember Jehovah, but when our strength is gone, when we are helpless and hopeless, when we faint, then in our desperate need we "remember Jehovah." "Man's extremity is God's opportunity." The Lord had seen and heard and delivered His fainting servant before. What about this time? Did Jonah remember Jehovah again? Yes, again he turned to Jehovah, and prayed: but not this time with his eyes directed towards His holy temple, in deep repentance, ready and willing to bow before Him and do His will. Sad, sad to say, Jonah had not even yet learned his lesson. Poor, weary, disappointed, fainting Jonah, still struggled on in his own selfwill, and once again requested for himself that he might die, saying, "It is better for me to die than to live."

Neither the tender pleadings and the loving care, nor the sterner lessons of the worm and the wind, had, apparently, had any effect on the sulky, selfwilled prophet. It was just the same request, again uttered in anger. It is remarkable that this time it is said "God" (not Jehovah, as before) said to Jonah, "Doest thou well to be angry for the gourd?" It would seem that the continued fit of bad-temper has taken away the intimacy that the covenant name of Jehovah would indicate, and God now addresses him on the same ground as He had dealt with the heathen Ninevites: "God (not Jehovah) saw their works . . . and God repented . . ." It is a solemn thing to remember that if we persist in our own way, and will not heed the tender strivings of the Holy Spirit, that not only is the intimacy of communion lost, but we must be dealt with on other ground than that of a loving child, hearkening to its Father's voice.

God's question is much the same as the one He had asked Jonah before. Then he was wisely silent. Selfwill and bad temper had made him grow bolder, and now he ventures to reply against God. He said, "I do well to be angry, unto death!" Foolish man! God in His grace did not take him at his word, did not answer that rash prayer. On the contrary, by a word of His mouth He illuminated the lessons of the gourd and the worm and the wind (which so far had passed unheeded), and in the most touching manner He deigned to justify to one of His own creatures His ways of grace towards the guilty city of Nineveh. It would be hard to find a brighter illustration of the character Jonah had given God, than the last two verses of our book. Abraham and Moses had taken upon themselves to reason with Jehovah (Gen. 18; Ex. 32; Num. 16); but, oh, how different their attitude! Jehovah Himself invites the guilty sinner to come and reason (Isa.

1:18), but that reasoning is nothing like Jonah's reasoning with his Maker. To us it would seem that Jonah deserved to be severely punished. If we had a naughty, selfwilled child that persisted in bad temper and sulkiness, we would probably soon give it a good spanking, and feel that it richly deserved its punishment; but the amazing grace of God still goes on in patience with His poor erring servant, and we believe wins the day.

Jehovah had the last word, as indeed He always must have; but listen to that "last word:" "Thou hast pity on the gourd, for which thou hast not laboured, neither madest it grow; which came up in a night, and perished in a night: and I, should not I have pity on Nineveh, the great city, wherein are more than a hundred and twenty thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left; and also much cattle?"

What a picture it is! Jonah, "exceeding glad" of the gourd, because it added to his own comfort, but utterly unconscious of the joy in heaven over a whole city that had repented; and even exceedingly displeased, and very angry, because it had done so, and thus been saved from destruction! Jonah was far more deeply concerned with the fate of the gourd, than he was with perhaps a million or more never-dying souls, who had just turned to the living and true God. What a lesson for us today! How many of us are far more deeply concerned over our gourds and our flowers, our houses and our business, our motors and our radios, than we are with the millions of perishing, yet never-dying, souls all about us. How many of us are "exceeding glad" of something that adds a little more to our own comfort and ease and luxury, but we are utterly unconscious and without a care or a thought as to whether there is joy, exceeding joy, in heaven over one sinner that repenteth. And we are "exceedingly displeased" and "very

angry" if anything happens to disturb our comfort, and upset the even tenor of our way. The heathen in their blindness may bow down to wood and stone, for all we care, provided the worms do not get into our gourds, and the sultry east wind does not smite us, or destroy our crops. Such is the heart of man, such is your heart and mine! Self ever takes the first place, unless the Lord has taught us to lift up our eyes and look off unto JESUS.

The Lord did not rebuke Jonah for having pity on the gourd. There was nothing wrong in that. The wrong lay in the fact that he gave more pity, more thought, more care, for a gourd that came up in a night and perished in a night, than for the teeming, perishing thousands of a great city. It is not by any accident that God used that expression, "perished" in a night. It is the fourth time in this little book we have heard that word "perish." Surely there would echo back in Jonah's mind the frantic words of that shipmaster, as he roused Jonah from his sleep, "Arise, call upon thy God, if so be that God will think upon us, that we *perish* not." Or again, could he ever forget the fervent prayer of those sailors as they cast him into the sea: "Let us not *perish* for this man's life, and lay not upon us innocent blood: for Thou, O Lord, hast done as it pleased Thee." Also, the agonized words of the people of Nineveh must have still been ringing in his ears: "Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from His fierce anger, that we *perish* not?" These people all perished not. God knew they were of more value than many gourds, and He found a way that they should not perish. He was willing that the gourd which came up in a night should perish in a night, in order to teach His servant the lesson he so greatly needed. Alas, how different was that servant! He would have been willing enough for all these men to perish, if his gourd might have been saved.

Note further: "Thou hast had pity upon the gourd, for the which thou hast not laboured, neither madest it grow." What does that tell us? It tells us of God's tender care, not for the gourd alone, but for the many thousands of Nineveh. Each individual life in that great city was precious in God's sight. Each one was the work of God's hand, for each one He had labored, and it was God alone who had "made each one to grow." This was true not alone of the grown men and women, but of the little children, and the cattle, whom God especially mentions in these verses. What a lesson this is to us as we see the vast numbers of the heathen, those utterly without God in the world. For each of these individually, God has a tender care, on the ground that He has labored for them, He has made them to grow. It is truly His hand that provides them day by day with their daily bread, though they have never learned to acknowledge Him as "Father." May the Lord help us to look on them with His own thoughts, and love them with a little of that wondrous love told out with such ringing eloquence in those words so familiar to us all: "God so loved the world"!

Of these thoughts of God, and of His love, Jonah seemed to be utterly ignorant and indifferent, but one believes that Jonah's eyes were at last opened, and that in the end he learned these magnificent lessons of God's grace and love, and his own utter vileness. Surely the existence of this little book, and especially this last chapter, is a witness to this fact.

The Lord could say to His disciples, as though it was so obvious they must all know it perfectly well: "Ye are of more value than many sparrows." Here was Jonah placing a higher value on a gourd (more worthless than a sparrow), than on a city that was so immense that there were a hundred and twenty thousand tiny children in it

(notice the Lord had counted the little children—He knew them each one), “and also much cattle.”

If it were not that it strikes home to all of us, we would be apt to despise Jonah most thoroughly. If we are honest, and weigh up what we spend on ourselves and on our own comforts, ease and luxury; then compare that with what we spend on the conversion of the heathen, we may find that in reality, we, like Jonah, value our perishing gourds at a good deal higher price than we value the perishing heathen. There are some of us who go even further than that: some are even “exceedingly displeased” and “very angry” with those who do have a care for these souls.

There is something peculiarly touching in those last words, “And also much cattle.” Though not numbered, like the little children, the cattle had worn sackcloth along with the people, and God had seen it, and the God who does not let one sparrow fall to the ground without His knowledge, shows us here His tender care for the cattle, who would have perished with their guilty owners. It is a grand truth that when a man is saved, all that pertains to him is under the dominion of a new master. Pharaoh wanted Israel to leave their cattle in Egypt when they went out of that country, but the magnificent answer is, “There shall not a hoof be left behind.” (Ex. 10:26) That is the right way. When you were converted, were your cattle converted, too? Was your business converted, and your bank account? The little children who do not know their right hand from their left, are they traveling the narrow way with you? All these were saved when the king of Nineveh and his people turned to God in repentance. That is the only right way for us to be saved also. If the little children and the cattle are not included there is something wrong.

If we are honest, the little book of Jonah hits most of us very hard indeed, but what comfort it may bring to our wounded souls to remember that Jonah's God is our God. We have to confess that the same patience, grace and mercy that followed Jonah from start to finish has also followed us from the start, and we doubt not that it will continue with us to the end. May He deliver us from our disobedience and selfwill, from our sulks and from our tempers! May He form and fashion us like unto Himself, and give us a true estimate of the real value of gourds and souls of men; and make us vessels, sanctified, and meet for the Master's use!

We will close our meditations on Jonah with the words of another: "It is sweet, after all, to see Jonah's docility in the end to the voice of God, manifested by the existence of this book, in which the Spirit uses him to exhibit what is in the heart of man, as the vessel of God's testimony, and (in contrast with the prophet, who honestly confesses all his faults) the kindness of God, to which Jonah could not elevate himself, and to which he could not submit." (Synopsis of the Books of the Bible, J. N. Darby, Vol. 1).

Lord, give the writer and the reader more of that sweet docility!

* * * * *

O teach me more of Thy blest ways
Thou Holy Lamb of God!
And fix and root me in Thy grace,
As one redeemed by blood.

O tell me often of Thy love,
Of all Thy grief and pain;
And let my heart with joy confess
That thence comes all my gain.

Lessons from Jonah the Prophet

For this, O may I freely count
Whate'er I have but loss;
The dearest object of my love,
Compared with Thee, but dross.

Engrave this deeply on my heart
With an eternal pen,
That I may, in some small degree,
Return Thy love again.



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