



“The righteous . . . shall grow  
like a cedar in Lebanon”

Psalm 92:12

Reading Companion  
to the Book of  
**Jonah**

*“So they read in the book in the law of God . . .  
and caused them to understand the reading”*

Nehemiah 8:8

By

Bill Daniels

## Preface

This book is the essence of a Bible study series taught at the New Germany Baptist Church in 2005. My earnest desire in putting these thoughts into print is simply to extend the blessing of the message of Jonah to the Lord's wider flock in some small way. May the Lord use it to this end.

I am so greatly thankful to many who have taught or written on the book of Jonah. Their ideas have substantially helped in forming my own thoughts and expressions herein, such that much found within the pages following did not originate with me. There is an interesting word in the Greek found once in the New Testament in Acts 17:18. The word is *spermologos* (σπερμολογος), having the idea at its root of picking up seeds, as do birds. Used of men it refers to those who collect whatever scraps might fall from the loads of the merchants in the marketplace. I suppose I am a bit of a seed-collector, chasing further and applying many a seed thought dropped from the lips of men much wiser than myself. If the Lord should be pleased to use my humble efforts toward your blessing, that is all my joy!

Bill Daniels

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“They that observe lying vanities  
forsake their own mercy.  
But I will sacrifice unto Thee  
with the voice of thanksgiving”

(Jonah 2:8-9)

## Introduction

Jonah is somewhat of an unknown in the Bible. We know little more of the man than what we find in the four chapters of his book. To this can be added one brief historical note found in II Kings 14:25, merely a mention that Jonah once predicted King Jeroboam's boundary extensions. Little is provided there of clues as to when Jonah lived and ministered, but enough to tell us that his hometown was Gath-hepher in western Galilee, a morning's stroll north of Nazareth. This factual morsel is enough to display the ignorance of the Jewish leaders when refuting Jesus Christ, insisting that "*out of Galilee ariseth no prophet*" (John 7:52).

Why the obscurity? Perhaps because it does not matter. If God reckoned we needed more on the man we would have it. Men write about *men*, managing to get themselves some impressed with the *man* through whom God worked. God writes about *God*, about His dealings with and through men, and we are impressed with the God who works through men. It is the Lord who always is the only really significant factor in any and every equation.

"*What is man, that Thou art mindful of him?*" (Heb. 2:6)

Thus this book of Jonah is an account of Jonah's God, with the Lord of glory right up front throughout. Note the contrast in books like Ruth or Esther, where we find the Lord much more behind the scenes.

Now many have been the attacks upon Jonah's book through the centuries, the ridicule circling largely around the idea of a man swallowed by a fish and surviving to tell of it. Obviously such denials arise out of man's consistent determination to deny the miraculous. But take miracles from the Bible and what god are we left with? What kind of Creator has no power of the miraculous? Once you have it settled in your head and heart that God made all things it comes clear that nothing is impossible with Him. And is not the book of Jonah, with all the Bible, simply *full* of miracles? Strange that this one should seem so especially in need of natural explanation (or denial). Should we not expect the devil's scorn upon a book so clearly expressing God's love for the whole world as this one does? We must never fall to the folly of taking as myth or allegory what God presents as history, for there would be no end to the devastation of such an approach. Let's leave the world and worldly church to think as they like. God's faithful have always looked the fool among the unbelieving of their

generation anyway. We are followers of the Lord Jesus Christ, and that great Author and Finisher of our faith simply accepted this prophet, *with* his experience in the fish, as historical (not hysterical) fact, stating that “*Jonah was 3 days and 3 nights in the whale’s belly*” (Matt. 12:39-41; Lk. 11:29-30, 32). Please understand therefore that *Jesus* stands or falls with Jonah. The Bible is a unit, like a body. Cut any part and it bleeds, with the whole of it affected and suffering.

Let’s chase now the broader themes or purposes of the book of Jonah. On the surface of it we see God’s grace to all people of earth, His eye of compassion on the Gentile as well as the Jew.

*“How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him . . . that publisheth salvation”* (Isa. 52:7; Rom. 10:15).

Do not miss how it is *feet* mentioned in the above missionary verse from Isaiah, not hearts. The Lord speaks of love that *walks*, a love carried out, with *its boots on!* We are going to find in this little book of Jonah a much-needed reminder to Israel (and us) of her mission.

So there is a lesson about God here in Jonah’s message, that “*God so loved the world*” in His

exceeding grace. And there is a lesson on missions here as well, that “*God so loved **the world***”. This should have been no surprise to the nation of Israel. God always meant that nation to be His channel of grace to *all nations*, as Jonah to Nineveh, and as His purpose for the church in this current age. Indeed it was toward this end “*that He gave His only begotten Son*”. *Jesus came! He landed!* Jesus came as the Word of God, the very expression of God’s communication to man. *That’s missions!* The basis of all missions in fact. Jesus sacrificed His comforts to come to us, even unto humiliation and death, in that supreme expression of God’s gracious missionary spirit.

As well, we see the sovereign God within these few chapters of Jonah’s book. That God holds the controls is indeed a large part of the message here. He accomplished His purpose for man despite man. He put a preacher where there was need for men to hear, despite great reluctance toward the missionary task. He gets His work done in spite of our inability and weakness and resistance. Behold the irony of the situation, of the Lord forcing a grudgingly reluctant preacher to proclaim an unhappy message of judgment, and thereby making His grace known in Nineveh!

Perhaps another purpose of this book is to show the ready response of Gentiles to God in contrast to the reluctance in His own people to obey. As Jewess Naomi grumbled about the Lord's dealings with her, while Gentile Ruth was so full of quiet faith. As Gentile wise men travelled for months at great expense to worship the Christ while sluggish Jerusalem only managed to be troubled (Matt. 2:1-3). No Jew bothered to travel but a few kilometres to check out that one "*born King of the Jews*". It took a Roman centurion (Luke 7:9) and a Syrian woman (Mark 7) to display "*so great faith*" in Israel. Behold a Samaritan revival (John 4; Acts 8) between two rejecting Jewish provinces. Greeks "*would see Jesus*" (John 12) amidst Christ's Passion Week persecutions and murder in Jerusalem.

The lesson is here for us as well. It is a word of rebuke to God's prideful, obstinate people. It was the Lord's meaning in Luke 4:25-28 when pointing to the widow of Zarephath who fed Elijah, and Naaman of Syria who was healed by Elisha, when none were so blessed in Israel. How often the Lord has searched in vain among those called by His name to find faithfulness. How often He must call one out of the world to do His bidding. Even the Gentile sailors of Jonah chapter 1 show a spiritual insight and godly fear missing at first in Jonah,

God's own prophet. They seemed to care about this Jew who brought them such grief, and sought to deliver him from harm, though the harm Jonah brought on them did not seem to trouble him in the least! Jonah's hardness contrasted with Gentile humility and receptivity throughout this little book is a telling aspect, exposing and rebuking Israel's cold unconcern for God and others, and speaking caution to my heart as well. Callous man is set in contrast to caring God and humbly responsive men in these few pages. Jesus warned of Nineveh rising up in judgment against Israel for their hardness (Lk. 11:29-32).

Of course another obvious purpose of Jonah's book is to provide a type or foreshadow of the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ (Matt. 12:38-41; 16:4), pictured in Jonah's experience in the fish.

## **Notable Distinctions in Jonah**

Jonah is one of four Old Testament (O.T.) prophets to which Jesus referred, with Elijah (Matt. 17:11-12; Lk. 4:25-26), Elisha (Lk. 4:27), and Isaiah (Matt. 15:7).

Jonah is the only O.T. prophet;

- Who was sent to preach to a gentile nation.

- Who ran from God or refused to carry out his commission.

Though Jesus called Jonah a “prophet”, this book carries no prophetic predictions, only historical narrative. The prophecy in this book is only in the form of typology, i.e. Jonah’s 3-day fish confinement pointing to the Lord’s 3 days in the heart of the earth.

“But Jonah rose up  
to flee unto Tarshish  
from the presence of the LORD,  
and went down...down...”

(Jonah 1:3)

# Chapter 1

## *The Reluctant, Running Prophet*

### *Jonah on the Sea*

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*1:1 Now the word of the LORD came unto Jonah the son of Amittai, saying,*

*1:2 Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before Me.*

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We are not told how the Lord made His message known to this prophet (angel? audible voice? dream?), but it obviously came with clarity for Jonah had no doubts about his commission. And have we any doubts about our own? Does the Lord not speak to us today with clarity through His written Word? Will the unsaved perish? Is it not just as vital for modern man to hear the gospel message as for Nineveh's numbers to hear God's warning? Are we not commanded to take that message to them? Is there an actual hell, a place of darkness where the worm never dies and the fire never quenched? Will the Lord really cast every unsaved soul there forever and ever? It is what the Book of books says, is it not? The message is unmistakable for those with no agenda. Yet so many good "Christian" folk would say, "Weeeelll..."

we must not make the mistake of reading the old Book in a simplistic, wooden literalist fashion. Fortunately we have the advances of modern intellectual scholarship to help us interpret ‘difficult’ passages such as these with a degree of sanity . . . blahdy, blahdy, blahdy, blahdy, blahdy, blahdy...” proceeding on to obscure the transparent. Hey do not miss how Jonah received God’s words *simply* and *literally!* That was the whole problem! He did not *like* what he knew very well he had heard. Same problem with modern liberal twits, who bleed the Bible of all meaning. Jonah had a touch more integrity than they. Rather than deceitfully attempting to explain God’s clear message away, *he bolted!* He knew what the Lord had said! He denied the act of it, not the fact of it. He grasped the simplicity of what it meant, just as we do today. He did not stop and say, “Now wait a minute, maybe I am misunderstanding this. Perhaps the true meaning is hidden under the surface of what appears an obvious statement”. The problem never really is in our understanding of God’s words. The problem is in the *receiving, believing, and doing.* So in a sense Jonah responded the same as modern liberal “scholarship” does, but in a different sort of way, if you know what I mean. They both run from the message. Jonah *physically* hoofed it. Modern rejecters *intellectually* bolt, dishonestly interpreting

the message as symbolical, allegorical, mythical, etc. A bit like when as schoolboys we sometimes scribbled out a tooth on the magazine picture of the pretty girl with the perfection of complexion, glossy hair, and glistening smile, transforming her within seconds with our pencil into the image of a hillbilly. Even so modern “scholars”, with conscience threatened by the lion of God’s Word, just paint all the teeth black, thinking, “There! No need to worry now.” But they deceive only themselves and those of like faithless heart. Self-servers! They shall be devoured!

*“Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it”* – Three sharp commands issued by the Lord here; Arise! Go! Cry! God influences people through people, and He meant to do the same in Nineveh through the person of Jonah. There are countless ways He could have gotten His message to Nineveh, but He sent *a man*. It is the way He works. When the apostles were clapped in prison in Acts 5, awaiting trial before the Jewish Council, the angel came, sprang them from jail, and sent them right back to the place where they were arrested to *“speak . . . to the people all the words of this life”* (vs. 20). That angel could have gone and preached in their absence, but the Lord works through preaching *men*. When it was God’s time to extend

the gospel message to the Gentile world in Acts 10, He sent an angel to Cornelius, not to bring him the words of life, but with instruction to send for the man, Peter, “*who shall tell thee words, whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved*” (Acts 11:14). God sends His message to people through people.

“*Arise [get up!], go*” – Would Jonah have been more comfortable in the more settled place of his own home? Hey, you know he would! Would he have been happier in the familiarity of his everyday tasks? Of course! We are all more comfortable in more familiar settings. But the man was under the *command* of the Lord God of heaven and earth to lift himself up out of his familiar place of comfort, to arise and Go! Yes it was a far journey, a trip of nearly 900 kms; the distance from Durban to the Zimbabwe border, or down to Knysna, or out into the Karoo. Little concern if you are on a Boeing, but when you are pushing a mule, *what a mission!* A journey of weeks, perhaps months. And to a *foreign* city, to an unfamiliar people with strange customs, despised Gentiles in fact, even to the hated enemy camp! And to people lowered to such evil that divine judgment was due, as in Sodom. A land like our own South Africa perhaps, with matters of murder and rape too commonplace to merit newspaper mention. The company and care of such folks was

far from the pleasure of God's prophet.

*“And cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before Me”* – Do you suppose foul folks such of those would appreciate being pushed, and by a foreigner? Yet Jonah must *“cry against”* them! *Alone* (humanly speaking)!

And *“cry!”* Did you hear that? Proclaim! Behold God's chosen method in the foolishness of preaching. Jonah was not sent;

- With a reformation program (with brief devotionals tagged on) seeking to change human *behaviour*.
- To establish societies for the abolition of murder, immorality, substance abuse, etc., or for Bible distribution.
- To legislate morality, seeking to establish laws enforcing greater righteousness and denying folks the unhindered practice of sin.
- With a “friendship evangelism” that seeks mainly to live a sweet Christian life before the unsaved, hoping they might ask why the difference, and praying for courage to answer when they do.

No! He was not sent with drama squad, puppet team, or gospel music group. He was not sent to start a desert camp ministry or cactus conference centre. He was sent simply to “*preach the word*”, to proclaim, to cry out, to be diligent in season and out of season, whether folks are happy to hear or not, to “*reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine*” (II Tim. 4:2). This is always God’s core method of reaching people. The simple preaching of the Word of God will always be the heart and soul of any true ministry of the Lord. The contemporary shift in church emphasis away from preaching to focus upon pagan-pleasing “worship” is only to the detriment of the proper biblical core of the church’s work on earth.

Again, Jonah must “*cry against*” Nineveh. From the beginning it was to be an open attack upon “*their wickedness*”, from the moment he arrived. It is God’s way, offensive, not defensive, for the gates of hell shall not prevail against the forward moving church of Jesus Christ. God arises to work with and through us when His method and message are used. And oh my, such a great deal of *negative* the message was to contain, exclusively so in fact (3:4). Would God have won the day through Jonah if he had not “*cried against*”? Would God have won the hearts of Nineveh if Jonah had watered the message

down to a wonderful plan for their lives from a sweet and cosy God? When we dilute the potency we take away the force and power God means to be there. N.B. Romans 1:16-18, where the powerful gospel has to do with “*the wrath of God*”. This is the gospel that is “*the power of God unto salvation*”. In every age good news is no good news unless there is first bad news. The very good news of the gospel assumes the bad news of God’s wrath upon the wickedness of every man’s heart.

“*To Nineveh, that great city*” – The “*great city*” of Nineveh was first mentioned in Genesis 10:11. Being one of the earliest cities of the world, founded over 4000 years ago, Nineveh was the ancient capital city of Assyria, located on the Tigris River. It was perhaps the largest city in the world of that day, being 5 kms x 2½ kms inside the walls. With surrounding suburbs outside the walls the city stretched to nearly 100 kms around, making it the city Jonah described as an “*exceeding great city of three days journey*” (3:3). A clue to Nineveh’s population is given in 4:11, with “*sixscore thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand*” (small children). Thus 120,000 infants and toddlers indicates at least *a million people* all told. The walls of the city were made of sun-dried brick, set on stone blocks sunk into the

ground to prevent undermining. Nineveh's walls were so thick 3 chariots could drive abreast on top, and as high as 30 metres in some places, bordered by the Tigris River on the west. This was the imperial city of Assyria, reflecting the power of the great Assyrian Empire. An absolutely glorious city in its day, Nineveh contained many royal palaces richly decorated with gold, silver, and cedar, one palace with as many as 71 rooms. Within her walls were many statues depicting Assyrian conquests, a vast library of clay tablets covering mathematics, medicine, astronomy, and other impressive human learning, and more than 30 magnificent temples. The nation of Assyria came to the peak of its power by the 8<sup>th</sup> century B.C., some 2800 years ago, the empire stretching from Egypt to India, from Russia to Arabia, its influence reaching out into the Mediterranean Sea.

Now behold little Jewish Jonah, called to "*cry against*" this bullying behemoth! Can you imagine?! "Lord, what am *I* going to do in that lot?! What kind of light could I hope to bring to the immensity of that darkness? It has been around just about forever, Lord! I would be fighting an ancient heritage. It is the seat and pride of Assyria. I would be opposing the very heart and soul of that great nation! It is *huge* and *magnificent!* What is little me

going to accomplish there?!” And the Lord’s response, “Nothing, Jonah! Nothing at all shall *you* accomplish there. However, placed in My hand, *I* will do wonders through even little you! *‘For without Me ye can do nothing.’*” As Andrew’s despairing reply before Jesus, with the little boy’s lunch in his hand, “*what are they among so many?!*” (John 6:9). It was an assignment with the look of hopelessness about it, like one man facing the teeming masses of London or Hong Kong. Yet is there not often a sense of nonsense about the Lord’s committed ones and their work for Him? Compare the seeming senselessness in sending Moses against Egypt, or Elijah against Israel under Ahab’s rule, or expecting the Lord’s two witnesses to accomplish anything in the coming day of Antichrist’s domain (Rev. 11). When the Lord sent Moses down to confront Egypt’s Pharaoh there was likely a good deal of fear and feeling of futility in Moses as well. This too was a mighty king of a mighty nation. A previous Pharaoh had in fact tried to kill Moses. He was no hero there, neither among Jew nor Gentile. The interchange there perhaps matching Jonah’s heart here. “*Who am I, that I should go unto Pharaoh?!*” And the Lord’s response to Moses, “*Certainly I will be with thee*” (Ex. 3:11-12). “But Lord, Your own people would not listen to me! What dent could I hope to make in Pharaoh and his pagan nation!?” “I never

said *you* were going to make any dents, Moses. **I** am holding the hammer. What I said was that certainly **I** will be with you". It is enough, and to spare!

The religion of Assyrian Nineveh involved the worship of pagan deities, child sacrifice in a form of worship similar to that of Molech in Ammon, astrology, magic, exorcism, and prostitution. Their filthy "religion" encouraged a filthy, lustful, coarse lifestyle.

More than anything else the Assyrians were known for their war-like nature and sadistic cruelty with the conquered. How they were hated and feared by all nations! The prophet Nahum (3:1-7) called Nineveh the "*city of blood*". It was no Sunday-school picnic when these marauders arrived on your doorstep painted for war. One can well imagine Jonah's concern in confronting such a barbaric nation. This was no place to go minding other people's business or bearing bad news. Something like poking a peeved mamba. Nor was this the calibre of people one cares to wish well upon. Judgment lined up on that lot was more cause for earnest celebration than efforts at restoration. We cannot condone Jonah's disobedience, but we can certainly understand his

reluctance, given the circumstances and the nature of the obstacle before him. He feared their terror. He wished for their destruction.

Consider as well God's prophecies concerning this hated people. Amos predicted Israel's "*captivity beyond Damascus*" (Amos 5:21-27). Hosea made promise that "*the Assyrian shall be his [Israel's] king*" (Hos. 11:1-5). The prophet Isaiah named "*the king of Assyria*" as one "*the LORD shall bring . . . upon thy people*" (Isa. 7:17). Now in Jonah's day Assyria's power was on the decline. But such prophecies indicated she would rise again (which of course is just what happened). Not exactly a satisfying assignment to aid an enemy lined up to later crush your own nation! Again, if judgment was aimed at that brood of vipers, then by all means! But such thoughts would only reveal Jonah's loyalty to country above loyalty to his Lord. How odd to actually dread success in God's mission, fearing Assyrian repentance and suspended judgment (4:2).

Now let's stand back and look at it for a moment. Consider how those Assyrians represented the hardest and most intimidating of personalities. Like a great, brash, braggart of a bully, a huge, swaggering, glowering Goliath of a city. Yet,

*1:3 But Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the LORD, and went down to Joppa; and he found a ship going to Tarshish: so he paid the fare thereof, and went down into it, to go with them unto Tarshish from the presence of the LORD.*

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through the foolishness of preaching God brought that people to their knees! Sometimes perhaps those hard, seemingly impenetrable cases are ripest for reception. Perhaps Satan sees that which we cannot see, the dangerous potential for his loss. So he stirs the brazen bitterness of such ones to the surface in an effort to discourage all potential evangelists. Is there somebody *you* are avoiding? Avoiding because you shudder with fear at approaching such a one for Christ? Somebody who looks by your estimation to be perfectly fit for destruction? That one may be closer to gospel reception than the nodding, agreeable types who welcome your religious discussions. Jonah walked right into the heart of this “*city of blood*”, and won their hearts. They repented of their evil, with their judgment withheld for nearly 200 yrs!

Moral of the story? *Arise! Go! Cry against!* No matter how intimidatingly vast the field of service or frightening the foe. Abide humbly in God’s hand and watch Him use you.

Vs. 3 – “*But Jonah rose up to flee*” – So Jonah was on the run, “*from the presence of the Lord*”. Do not miss how this point is underscored by repetition in this verse. He went down to Joppa, a city with a port on the Mediterranean coast. He paid his fare and “*went down*” into a ship headed in the opposite direction from the Lord’s will. Harry Ironside pointed out how Jonah’s flight from the Lord involved such a lot of *going down* (vs. 5 as well). The way of the self-willed is always tilted sharply downward. Even as Lot went *down* to Sodom, and it was all downhill from there.

Yet, look at it! See how the circumstances all seemed to point to far-away Tarshish. There happened to be a ship going there. Praise God for the open door! There happened to be room on that ship. And Jonah happened to have enough money. Must be the Lord’s will with so many indicators aligned! Right?

When shall we finally come to see,  
What a feeble guide circumstance can be?

The same lesson would be learned again centuries later by unhappy sailors on the same sea. The Apostle Paul, having appealed to Caesar, was being transported to Rome as a prisoner in Acts 27. They had sailed as far as the south side of Crete. It was

late in the season for sailing. And Paul, having some perception “*that this voyage will be with hurt and much damage*” (vs. 10), spoke a warning to the Centurion in charge. Paul’s foreboding was from the Lord, but unfortunately it was counsel ignored, partly because in the morning they awoke to find that “*the south wind blew softly*” (vs. 13). The circumstance could not more perfectly encourage their departure. It was a *wind* – just what they needed for their sails. It was *gentle* – ideal for carrying them on a bit further to a better winter haven. And it was a “*south wind*” – just the right direction. Could not be more perfect, m’ lads! All seeming to line up against the counsel of God’s man. Ah but will you take the wind or the Word, oh sailor upon life’s sea? For as we know, the Word soon prevailed as the wind wildly galed, suddenly turning far from anything gentle, and ultimately causing the loss of everything but the lives on board. The principle of the gentle south breeze teaches the wise observer that one willing to ignore the counsel or command of God will often find God willing to confirm that wayward choice with favourable circumstances.

For that soul despising God’s Word thru conditions,  
God paves his wilful way to destruction!

Consider how the Lord has done the same with

creation, providing just enough rope (questions, uncertainties) for the desperate evolutionist to hang himself. Wind or Word, my friend? You cannot always have both I'm afraid, since they are often found moving in different directions. In fact they will *very likely* be so if you choose to ignore God's counsel. The immoral person does the same when he says, "No, but the Lord brought this person into my life through the most phenomenal circumstances" or "it was a chemical thing". The homosexual does the same when he insists his unnatural passions are from the Lord. Men are so given to justifying their evil, even when the Lord has already clearly spoken.

Now it was rather a far journey to Tarshish, all the way across the Mediterranean it would seem, somewhere in southern Spain some suspect. Therefore we can assume that fare Jonah paid was surely quite considerable. Like the cost of a plane ticket to Europe – *thousands* in modern terms. Money lined up for a dead loss (unless they put Jonah's fare money back into his pocket before pitching him over the side, which is highly unlikely). Please understand that anytime one runs from the Lord's will, on top of all the other waves and billows he is sure to face, it will likely empty his pockets as well. Elimelech and Naomi wrongly ran to Moab

from the drought in Judah (Ruth 1). Why did they do it? To preserve finance and property. What was the result? They lost *everything*, including the lives of all the men, both bread and bread-winners! Another case where the unbidden flight of God's people from the land of promise brought trouble, as with Jonah. Lot, against better judgment, chose the cities of the plain, when the reputation for evil there was well known. Why? Because the place promised financial advantage. Yet in the end, Lot lost everything, and every vestige of his honour with it. Choices running against God's perfect will always cost too much, in more ways than we can ever imagine.

*“From the presence of the Lord”* – Oh the import of this little phrase! There is a history here, ranging all the way back to Adam, the first to foolishly depart from God into sin (Gen. 3:8; 4:17). And did Adam get away from the Lord? Has anybody ever gotten away in running from the Lord? The impossibility of such is expressed so beautifully in Psalm 139. The phrase *“before the LORD”* is often used in the Bible to describe man or angel standing ready to do the Lord's will. In Zechariah 3:1 Joshua the high priest stood *“before the angel of the LORD”* as a vision of one fully resolved to do His will. To so stand before the Lord speaks of a heart submissive

*1:4 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.*

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toward Him, of availability. Jonah did much more than just get on a boat and leave Israel when he chose to disobey. He treacherously left “*the presence of the Lord*” his God, posting the sign on his life’s door, “*NOT AVAILABLE!*”

“*But the LORD...*” – Agh no man! Now why did the Lord have to “*but*” in?! Everything was going just fine up to that point. Ah, but we must remember it was Jonah who *butted out* of the Lord’s programme first (“*But Jonah...*”, vs. 3). Now the Lord was butting back. And oh my, Jonah soon discovered who was the bigger and better “*butter*”! Praise God He butts back, and for our good! Every man who ever butted against the Lord got butted back. How gracious the Lord to seek His disobedient servant here, even to not let him remain long in his sin.

Heretics like to make a great show of offence when God’s children deny their falsehoods, suggesting we are quite out of line to knock their freedom to believe as they like. But we must always remember that they were first to butt out of the Lord’s truth with their folly, and it is the Lord busy butting back

through us.

*“If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; even there shall thy hand lead me, and Thy right hand shall hold me”* (Ps. 139:9-10).

Jonah was flying those *“wings of the morning”* to *“the uttermost parts of the sea”*. *“But the Lord”* was taking hold with His right hand. The joy of the faithful! The terror of the faithless!

*“But the LORD sent out a great wind”* – In the Hebrew behind the English, the verb translated *“sent out”* carries the idea of “cast out” or “hurled”.

*“A mighty tempest in the sea”* – *“Great wind...mighty tempest”!!* Can we even begin to imagine the scene? The mountainous waves. The cavernous depths of the troughs. The lashing, driving hurricane winds. The sea continually, thunderously dashing over the deck of the little ship. Imminent danger of body or boat swept overboard or swamped, or broken to pieces (*“like to be broken”*) in the massive violence of the wind and waves. These were mariners or sailors, thus men accustomed to storms at sea. But they could see a difference here. Even they seemed quite certain the ship could not last, and they were surely going to die!

1:5 *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. But Jonah was gone down into the sides of the ship; and he lay, and was fast asleep.*

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Vs. 5 – *“Then the mariners were afraid”* – In their terror they *“cried every man unto his god”*. Whether or not they were religious before, they were now, crying out to the god of their understanding as they held on for dear life, knowing only a miracle could save them. The blind stupidity of atheism is probably a relatively recent human idiocy, certainly the popularity of it. In years gone by most everybody was clever enough to admit some god, for only *“the fool hath said in his heart, There is no god”* (Ps. 14:1; 53:1).

They did what they could, casting *“forth the wares that were in the ship into the sea, to lighten it of them”* (same Hebrew word here used of the Lord in vs. 4, “hurled”). Cargo, ship’s tackle, etc., over the side, hoping to increase the buoyancy of their little bark. As well, by reducing the ship’s mass they hoped to lessen wave impact upon the timbers. Such procedures of course were a very last resort, again pointing to the unnatural violence of this storm. How many thousands of Rands over the side

do you suppose? Do you see it? Jonah's foolishness will cost him much, but it did not only cost him!! These poor mariners paid dearly as well. I hope they did keep Jonah's fare!

Others also lose when rebellion we choose.

Such losses perhaps in many ways we are not even aware of. I wonder if Jonah even knew at that time how his actions emptied that ship? He slept through it all! Of course God later showed him, to his sorrow, for surely he wrote the book.

In the name of love for others *live for God!* A man's godless choices bring loss and shame to his family, friends, church, neighbours, not only to himself. Proverbs makes the repeated point that a child's rejection of God's wisdom and way not only disgraces himself but also shames his parents who gave him life (Prov. 17:21, 25; 19:13; 29:15). Compare Achan's foolish fall to rebellious disobedience (Josh. 7). His act resulted in 36 men dead at Ai, the whole nation falling to such shame and defeat and despair, and Achan's entire family put to death with him. No man sins on his own! Compare the great loss of Lot and family through his carnal choices, ending in the most complete ruination of his property and name (Gen. 20). The whole group is inflicted with loss when *one* chooses

sin. And if we need further proof that no man is an island we need only look to Adam. Could we even begin to estimate man's combined loss in every way because that first man chose to sin? I do not claim to understand entirely the *reason* for the principle, but I see the *reality* of it. You cannot choose sin without firing a scatter-gun of devastating effect into the crowd of your society (and progeny). And oh how wide the swath cut by that blast.

*"But Jonah . . . was fast asleep"* – Do you recall how Jesus slept through the raging storm on the Sea of Galilee too (Mk. 4:38)? How very different that sleep from this. That peaceful rest was the sleep of confident trust *in* God's will. This the dull sleep of carnal stupor *out* of God's will, dulled by indifference and seared of conscience. Sinful disobedience has a way of rendering one insensible and hard, no longer responsive to the voice of God, though it be a raging tempest.

*"Because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold"* (Matt. 24:12).

No longer are *we* sensitive and responsive to the anguished cries of perishing souls I fear. Even while all of the terror of death, and desperate efforts at self-preservation, and crying out to false gods is taking place all around us. Here on this wind-

tossed ship is perhaps a capsulated picture of the world in their sin. Behold their terrible anguish in the traumas of life, and their terror in death;

*“Who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage”* (Heb. 2:15).

See their feverish activities, desperately bringing filthy rag “righteousness” to God (Isaiah 64:6) in their efforts at self-justification or reformation. And this while the man of God, the one holding all the answers, the only answers in fact, is fast asleep! Oh my heart! How we point an accusing finger at this man Jonah. Yet do we not sleep the same insensitive, unconcerned, dull, selfish sleep of Jonah, while the world thrashes about on the deck of life, in the throes of death, and perishing all around us? Even now they go through all of the same desperate commotions out there as these sailors. Such heartless unconcern for the pathetic plight of others is the fit reaction of the apathetic world, even as *“Gallio cared for none of these things”* (Acts 8:17), but it should never be *our* response.

Oh my friend, if we are not sleeping down in the hold then maybe we are watching rugby or cricket, passing countless empty hours at Nothingness Stadium, or in front of some blinking entertainment screen. Jesus said, *“I must work the works of Him*

*1:6 So the shipmaster came to him, and said unto him,  
What meanest thou, O sleeper? Arise, call upon thy  
God, if so be that God will think upon us, that we  
perish not.*

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*who sent Me, while it is day: the night comes, when  
no man can work” (John 9:4).*

*“Redeeming the time, because the days are evil”  
(Eph. 5:16).*

It must be more than just tossing a lifeless lob into the work of God on earth of meagre, feeble efforts, as a sop to calm our uncomfortable conscience. The tempest and battle is raging right now out there. What meaningful input are you personally investing into the rescue efforts?

Vs. 6 – *“What meanest thou, O sleeper?”* – Jonah received his wake-up call! How suddenly the Lord brought to his conscious awareness the treachery of what he had done and the rage of God’s righteous offence. Jonah awoke to the fury of this most incredible storm, *his* storm, and to the heat of God’s wrath.

How ironic, indeed shameful, that the man of God must be called (commanded) to prayer by a heathen mariner, and reproved by the same for his sleepy

indifference in the danger! How often the unsaved world finds it necessary to rebuke God's people, and with good cause. Compare Abraham rebuked for his lies by Egypt's Pharaoh in Genesis 12 and by Abimelech in Genesis 20. A common excuse of the unsaved to remain so involves a reproving stance against Christians. "I know somebody who claims to be saved, but who could sure stand to have his righteousness quotient jacked up a notch or three! I have learned some things in the fine art of cheating from that 'Christian!'" The world knows more about what believers ought to be than many believers do I'm afraid! They certainly know believers ought to be different, holier, humbler, kinder, etc. But unfortunately it seems the compromising church of our day wears their sin and carnality like a badge, like they are proud of it. They want to swear and cheat like the world, dress carnally like the world, rave and carouse and drink like the world. Why? Why my brothers? Because foolish Christianity thinks such compromise with evil is the way to win the unsaved. They think it the way to make Christianity attractive and "relevant", to show the watching world that they do not need to make any real changes or give up much to be a Christian. But such folly backfires, for even the unsaved world sees through it. Far from being attracted to such false Christianity, they say, "Hey, you like sin as much

*1:7 And they said every one to his fellow, Come, and let us cast lots, that we may know for whose cause this evil is upon us. So they cast lots, and the lot fell upon Jonah.*

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as I do. You who claim to be a holy child of God are no different from me, no cleaner than me. There is no greater holiness or dignity among you. Your sins are as apparent as ours. What is the difference?” We have lost sight of God’s goal for his own, of a *holy blamelessness!* “*To make a difference between the clean and unclean*” is the heart and soul of sanctification – “*holiness to the Lord*”.

Though Jonah does not at first admit himself the stinking fly in the ointment, the finger of God will now point him out. Watch how it happens. The sailors concluded that such a storm could only result from the wrath of the gods against someone on board. This common pagan conclusion was likely more sourced in superstition, but it happened to aim straight in this case. So they cast lots to flush out the rascal. The casting of lots would probably involve several things of nondescript shape placed in a bag, one of a different colour, and each man in turn reaching in to take one out. Interesting how often God has honoured this method for exposing men (Achan, Jonathan). Not

that it is a method particularly approved by God, but allowed by Him (as Gideon's fleece) at certain crucial times.

*“And the lot fell upon Jonah”* – Lo and behold there was Jonah;

- *Fully exposed* before God and man with no way out!
- Trembling before an offended God whose anger was only dimly exhibited in the raging tempest hurling all around him, filling his every sense.
- Surrounded and under the most intense scrutiny of these desperate sailors.
- Trapped like a chess piece, pinned and without options for recovery.
- Outmanoeuvred and thoroughly defeated.

What bitter anxiety must have filled Jonah's heart in those moments, as he considered the confession he must now make and what might come of it. Questions began flying at him, two and three speaking at once. Do you hear the intensity in their words? *“Tell us, please . . .”*! I cannot help but think how effective and abundant are God's manifold methods of finding out and exposing our sin. In the

*1:8 Then said they unto 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?*

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flash of a moment Jonah awakes to find himself completely stripped of cover, pinched in the Lord's vice of circumstances, with no choice but to expose himself before these earnest sailors. "*Behold your sin will find you out*" (Num. 32:23). God had caught up with Jonah! He always catches His man, either to reward and bless or to judge and curse. You may fool people for a time, but God saw it! Though darkness, secrecy, time, and even the "safety" of death may hinder detection by mere men, such hiding places mean absolutely nothing to the Lord.

*"All things are naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do"* (Heb. 4:13).

*"Be not deceived; God is not mocked"* (Gal. 6:5).

How foolishly we think to get away with sin. As foolishly absurd as that image of Adam and Eve in Genesis 3 hiding from the Lord among the trees of Eden! Trees the Lord Himself had made! Laughable in its silliness! Cryable in its heartbreak! How daft David's desperate efforts to cover his sin tracks with Bathsheba. Thwarted he was by her husband,

Uriah's, faithful integrity and sacrificial refusal to please himself. The very character qualities David was falling down on. Then the king was boldly exposed by faithful Nathan, with the careful secret recorded for all ages in the eternal Book of books! Could not possibly be *less* a secret now I'm afraid. Are we not just as laughably, cryably silly when we expect to cover our sin tracks? If only the assurance of God's all-seeing eye and His most certain eventual exposure of evil would keep us from being just like Jonah. If only such wonderful knowledge would prevent our ever turning from God's perfect will in anything. Why does it not accomplish this in us? Because our hearts are "*deceitful above all things and desperately wicked*". Because sin blinds and dulls us, making us stupid, blinding our eyes of faith from seeing the Lord above all.

Compare how very different the Apostle Paul's experience in the great storm on this same sea in Acts 27-28. Paul was not running *from*, but *for* the Lord there. And he arose in the context of that storm as the obvious leader, with all eyes on him for guidance in the end. From the point of his warning ignored Paul became the unofficial leader. The captain later listened when Paul said no lifeboats (27:31-32). All listened when Paul said eat, and led in a prayer of thanks (27:33-35). All were comforted

with Paul's words of assurance promising safety (27:36). And the captain refused to kill the prisoners for Paul's sake (27:42-43). Paul's presence arose even higher on the island of Malta, where he survived the snake-bite and was recognized as a great man (28:3-6) and was used of God to heal "*the chief man of the Island*", Publius (28:7-8). Paul's presence ensured friendly treatment for all by the islanders (28:10). Courageous righteousness always leads to leadership. Trust me. You stand up and live for God and speak for the truth and care for people and endure the scorn among your peers, and you will rise to the top too. In fact, you will already be showing yourself a leader.

Look well to the shameful contrast in Jonah. All eyes are on him too, but not as a leader. All focus in fact burns down upon him in scorn. He is exposed, caught, defeated, having drawn these men into his own judgment, endangering their lives. Yet even this smarting rod of God has been brought upon Jonah for his best. No discipline for the moment seems *joyous*, but *grievous*, yet its purpose is ever to bring the peaceable fruits of righteousness in those so disciplined (Heb. 12).

Now Jonah, as any criminal, had forfeited all right

1:9 *And he said unto them, I am an Hebrew; and I fear the LORD, the God of heaven, which hath made the sea and dry land.*

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to privacy. How justly they subjected him to the most penetrating investigation. “Tell us! We know you are the one who brought this upon us! *What is your occupation?*” Behind this perhaps such queries as; “Is your occupation lawful?” “Are you a criminal?” “Is your work something the gods approve of?” “*Where do you come from?*” Behind this perhaps; “What kind of scene did you leave behind somewhere?” “Are you travelling on this ship to flee from some gruesome murder?” “Are you a thief, having escaped a lynch-mob, and now the gods have caught up with you?” As the Islanders first thought of snake-bitten Paul (Acts 28:4). “What evil could you have done to bring such horror upon us?” One after the other the questions came in desperate earnestness. Can you imagine Jonah’s sorrow and shame as he spoke through the storm the dark confession of his guilt before these heathen men, before whom the Lord had so exposed him?

To Jonah’s credit there is no cover-up now. His brave response is as honest as it is humble. Who would not be humbled in such a display of God’s

*1:10 Then were the men exceedingly afraid, and said unto him, Why hast thou done this? For the men knew that he fled from the presence of the LORD, because he had told them.*

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almighty power?

*“I fear the LORD”* – Perhaps Jonah was just beginning to. “I worship the God whose domain is heaven and earth and sea, who created and rules over all”.

At last Jonah’s character begins to arise. I admire his honesty. He spoke simply and truly. He did not hide or shade anything. He offered no excuses for his actions. His pride might have spurned so exposing himself to these Gentiles. He may have feared their reproachful response. Nevertheless Jonah spoke openly, and the sailors had their reason for the tempest. I remember during my years at Bible College when the school treasurer was caught in fraud. And, though so shameful the deed done, he bravely stood in the congregation and publicly admitted his crime. Ugly his deed, but noble his brave admission. I remember admiring his courage then, in spite of his wrong.

*“Why hast thou done this?”* – How shocked and

terrified were these men. Again the irony. Look at their grave concern over such actions in contrast to the indifference in the man of God. “You did *what!*? To *Whom!*!?? What on earth did you do *that* for?! How could you possibly?!” It is an exclamation of horror at his actually trying to run from the LORD, such a God of heaven and earth. They were seeing firsthand the power of the God Jonah served, displayed in such a tempest as they had never before seen. They simply could not fathom how one could dare rebel against such a One. The storm preached God’s almighty power better than Jonah ever could. Oh there was *rebuke* in their response! These unsaved, pagan sailors were shocked and terrified that Jonah would dare provoke such a God of creative power. They saw it as *shear madness!* And indeed it was! These pagan sailors were more sensitive and concerned about Jonah’s sin than Jonah was.

How typical of God’s people throughout the ages. So well supplied with God’s words, that special revelation of Himself, but so often so cold and unaffected by it. It is the same feeling one gets in reading the gospels. The Jews carried the whole revelation of God, yet rejected that One so evidently revealed as the Messiah. Even there, Gentiles, with access to so much less of God’s revelation,

responded to Jesus Christ while the Jews as a whole rejected Him. When Martin Luther was finally saved he found in the established church his deadliest enemy. When John Wesley was saved as an ordained Anglican minister and sought to tell his world of salvation by faith alone in Jesus Christ alone, the settled, established church began closing its doors to him, calling his gospel emphasis “enthusiasm” and “unorthodox”, the very gospel they had lost track of. So Wesley went to the open fields and preached there to the thousands. George Whitefield had already been driven to the fields for the same reason. The established church was comfortable in its dead orthodoxy, and men such as these were an *intrusion!* They were jiggling the pews, waking folks up, and they were annoyed! Charles Spurgeon faced the same in the Baptist Union of Britain. Dwight Moody discovered the same thing. When he was saved he wanted to tell the world about the Saviour he had found. So Moody reserved the front couple of pews at the church he had begun attending and then proceeded to fill those pews with dirty, smelly, Chicago street kids, so they could hear the preaching of the Word and find the new life in Jesus Christ he had. Well the venerable church members began whinging about Moody’s unconventional methods, and the street urchins on their pretty clean pews, forcing

Moody to set up his own preaching place. I wonder, if a Moody were gloriously saved in our day and wanted to turn the world right side up for Jesus, would we discourage him and charge him with unorthodox enthusiasm, and maybe breathe a sigh of relief when he finally pushed off. And then straighten out our ruffled feathers and settle back into our comfortable sleepy indifference? We all ought to be on fire for Jesus Christ at all times.

Now there is something more here in vs. 10. Compare the difference between vs. 5 & 10. In vs. 5 “*the mariners were afraid*”. But in vs. 10 “*were the men exceedingly afraid*” (*super* scared!). Their fear soared in vs. 10. Why? Because in vs. 5 they were dealing with natural phenomena of storm, wind, waves, weather, etc. Familiar ground for mariners, yet altogether greater than these men had ever seen, thus their fear. Their terror arose from a certainty that the ship could not hold up, and they would likely die. But their *exceeding* fear in vs. 10 is born out of the confirmation that they were not only dealing with natural phenomena, but with God! And with *such* a God!! A God who was dealing with man so directly, so personally, so powerfully. They were confronted by the omnipotent God of creation...***offended!*** This God of all power was displayed so graphically in *such* a storm, angered so

awesomely by this one who had dared to run from Him. Understand it! If such a One is so enraged by *His own, His prophet*, and through one act of rebellious disobedience, then how might they be viewed by such a God of gods!? Men whose entire lives had been lived in careless ignorance and unconcern for His will! They had never obeyed this One! Did not even know Him to obey Him. I believe this was what magnified their horror. They had discovered themselves to be sinners in the hands of an angry, all-powerful God, and *they were utterly aghast! Undone* before the Almighty! Not just time, but eternity was staring them in the face! Not just death, but *eternal* death! Not just a crashing sea, but a *closed heaven!* Oh they had lived ignorant of Jehovah, the true God! Until this moment they had worshipped their dumb idols, gods of their own choosing. False gods, proven powerless now before the Almighty. Gods upon which they had called to no avail, like the prophets of Baal on Carmel (I Ki. 18). Who can imagine the astonishment when one finds his religion, what he has always trusted, to be a myth, a vain empty nothing! Stripped of their empty former trusts, they were confronted with the Supreme God, *whom they did not know* and could not hope to appeal to! A terrible God of the storm! The falseness of their former trusts only exposed when confronted with the true. Oh what a moment,

when a soul first discovers they have been deluded, deceived! Like the earth dropping away from beneath the feet! As *all* the unsaved shall find themselves in that coming day when standing for their final judgment before the Great White Throne, with both earth and heaven fled away (Rev. 20). For a gasping, breathless moment these men lived without a god! But more horrifyingly, without the true God, the Almighty One! But though standing in absolute terror, it was for their good that they faced this too, for the eyes of their understanding were even then being pried open. God's *terrible* work in their lives was a *grace* work too, as with Jonah. His terrible work is always of grace. Like the parent who is justly a holy terror to the rebellious child. For his good, out of genuine tough love.

Look well now! What doctrine or teaching about Himself does the Lord use to effectively pry open those blind eyes? "God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life"? Soft, prissy-sissy stuff? Cardboard crowbars such messages would be! Fit to accomplish little of any real import. Rubber hammers, fit to fracture nothing that needs breaking. Whipped-cream ploughshares, able to cut nothing, move nothing, lay open no hardened soil, unfit for any real work of God upon sin-

hardened souls. No folks! See how it was the terror of the offended righteousness of Almighty God that pierced “*to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, joint and marrow*”. The rumblings and smoke of the offended law must come before the good news of forgiveness in Jesus Christ. These sailors were stunned into the realization of their perilous danger, not of mere death at sea, but of facing He who can destroy both soul and body in hell (Matt. 10:28). The exceedingly fearful fate of falling into the hands of the living God (Heb. 10:31). He who is a “*consuming fire*” (Heb. 12:29). Even as the law of God displays our offence, declares our just judgment, and drives us to plead for mercy. Only when one sees himself as truly guilty, exposed, condemned before the bar of God, with all of the rage of Jonah’s storm, and an infinity more, all poised, tensioned, and ready to explode upon the unredeemed soul, only with the clean-cutting insight of *that* vision is one ready for grace. Then the goodness of God breaks forth upon a soul as a ray of light in the darkness, leading to repentance. The fallow ground of the hearts of these men was thoroughly furrowed and broken up by this confrontation with the righteous wrath of the Almighty. And now at last they were ready to receive His grace.

*1:11 Then said they unto him, What shall we do unto thee, that the sea may be calm unto us? For the sea wrought, and was tempestuous.*

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I fear that many who call themselves saved or Christian today have never reckoned with the treacherous offence of their sin before the Holy One. They have never felt the burden of their “*desperately wicked*” heart, and thus cried out in anguished appeal to He who alone can grace us in Jesus Christ. They have never truly trembled before the wrath of the offended Almighty One. As those of John 10:1, they have not entered through the door into the sheepfold. Instead they have climbed up some other way. Such are “*thieves and robbers*” Jesus said, who profess to know Jesus, but are no true possessors of life in Christ.

Ah look well at this good beginning of Jonah’s missionary work among the Gentiles. He fled from such work to the east, and God ran him right into the same to the west. Willing or no, God used this rebel prophet in a back-door fashion, as a channel of His grace to these Gentile sailors.

Vs. 11 – “*What shall we do unto thee?*” – Fear of God brought fear of mishandling God’s prophet. They

*1:12 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 for my sake this great tempest is upon you.*

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knew they needed to do something with Jonah. But they did not dare mete out their own punishment when they had now come to realize the power of Jonah's God. Fear of God is fear of angering and offending Him, and such a healthy dose of it in these earnest souls now.

Vs. 12 – *“Take me up, and cast me forth into the sea”* – Jonah's advice took real courage. He is a different man himself. He admits death his due for his rebellion, and he is willing to endure the punishment. There is perhaps a measure of penitence here, though strangely he is still not on speaking terms with the Lord. Jonah had yet to cry out to God in repentant resignation to His will. Even in this context of earnestly praying sailors, with Jonah shaken awake with the captain's command to pray to his God, still *Jonah has yet to pray at all!* There seems little more than a “rats-I-got-caught!” sort of attitude in him. So understand it. Jonah's rebellion brought the storm, and his continued rebellion brought the fish. There must be sincere confession before forgiveness of sin.

Jonah was willing to sacrifice his life for the lives of the sailors he endangered. Again, there is a measure of nobility here. He has openly confessed his flight, and he is willing to endure the penalty rather than further endanger others. But I wonder if Jonah was also thinking this the ultimate way out of his assignment. We later find him openly wishing death on himself over the hated task (4:3 & 8). It seems he would rather die than bring God's message to the heathen hoards of Nineveh. Ah, *but God...!* The God of grace had a plan! The Lord met every Jonah-move with an effective counter-move. Run away, and God met him with a storm. Seek death, and God met him with a fish. Abraham's slow obedience, delaying in Haran, was met with the death of his father (Gen. 11:31-32). Balaam's mad run, with greed-flooded heart, was met by a mighty angel with drawn sword (Num. 22:22). King Ahab's crafty ploy, involving Jehoshaphat's sacrifice, was met with a divinely aimed arrow (I Ki. 22:34). Nobody out-manoeuvres God. Again, "*be not deceived, God is not mocked*" (Gal. 6). Every Jewish lawyer and scribe coming at Jesus with crafty, loaded question got his little bubble burst, and scurried away with the settled decision within to not try *that* again. In fact even Satan himself, seeking to cut off God's purpose with the death of Messiah, found himself out-moved by God to fatal effect (Col.

2:15).

*“I know that for my sake this great tempest is upon you”* – “I brought this on you!” What a heartache when a man finally recognizes that he is the cause of injury, or harmful habits, or evil decisions in others. Adam’s choice to sin ran the whole human race into darkness (Gen. 3). Noah’s sin drew out Ham’s evil heart, to his sin and cursing (Gen. 9). The deception of Rebecca and Jacob became the deceiving story of Jacob’s family into the future (Gen. 27). Achan’s choice for sin buried his whole family with him (Josh. 7). Abraham’s partial obedience resulted in Lot landing in Sodom and the most terrible trouble there. Lot’s evil choices led on to evil in his family. David’s sexual sin tended to characterize his family from then on. What we choose to be and do shapes those around us, either to blessing or cursing.

Jonah at least acknowledged “I did this to you!” But his admission seems purely on a human level. It is indeed commendable, though not nearly far enough. Not yet. For he has yet to sincerely look up. *This* is what God is looking for! And the storm does not stop crashing, not around Jonah anyway, until the Lord finally receives this response in the next chapter.

*1:13 Nevertheless the men rowed hard to bring it to the land; but they could not: for the sea wrought, and was tempestuous against them.*

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Vs. 13 – *“Nevertheless the men rowed hard to bring it to the land”* – The sailors dared not carry out Jonah’s death sentence immediately, probably out of fear to touch such a one, out of fear of crossing Jonah’s God, wanting to exhaust every reasonable alternative first. So they decided to make a try at escaping the storm by some hard, earnest rowing for land. But alas, they found they could not.

*“For the sea wrought and was tempestuous against them”* – Same phrase as in vs. 11. It was all lined up *“against them”*, this avenue cut off as well. The circumstances were relentlessly forcing them, driving them, channelling them to the only option, of doing as Jonah had advised. Just as the Lord was doing to Jonah, relentlessly pushing him to the only option of finally casting himself upon the Lord’s mercy. The irresistibility of God in carrying out His purpose is a major lesson of this little book. Here again we find the Lord counter-moving every human effort against His will.

Vs. 14 – *“Wherefore they cried unto the LORD”* – I hear an echo of Psalm 115 in this earnest mariner

*1:14 Wherefore they cried unto the LORD, and said, We beseech Thee, O LORD, we beseech Thee, 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.*

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prayer. We read there as well, against the ugly backdrop of idolatry, how the Lord “*hath done whatsoever He hath pleased*” (vs. 3). Do not miss how the Lord now hears from them, while Jonah remains prayerless still. Their fear of the true God at last broke out into a heavenward plea. And *such* a prayer! They were all earnestness, passion, and desperation. See how the Lord answered this, for He hears such prayers. Oh may these unsaved sailors teach our hearts, we whose prayers are so often so cold and formal, impassionate and full of phrases as empty as they are oft-repeated, performing more dead ritual than really talking to our God. Only “*the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much*”. Can we really expect foolishly feeble prayers to ever get through the ceiling and up close to God’s throne? I fear we are too often too similar to Christ’s description of the Pharisee of Luke 18, who “*stood and prayed thus with himself*” (vs. 11). Not so the simple, meaningful, earnest pleading of these men, more convinced of God’s reality than many a Christian.

“We beg of you, O Lord, we beg of you! Please do not let us unfairly die for the offence of this man! And please do not reckon his death against us when we throw him into the sea, as if criminals also and worthy of the same fate for killing an innocent man! For You, O Lord, have done as You please. You are forcing our hand. We would join You in doing Your pleasure.” So fearful of offending, they so sincerely desired God’s pleasure! “Oh Let us not make a mistake! Let us not do anything to displease You”. It is the kind of heart God honours, and He surely knows when it is for real.

Hey, do you remember how only a few moments ago these same sailors were crying out to their pagan gods? But now to the *true* God they cry, to the Creator of sea, land, and heavens. Perhaps lessons of faith and dependence, indeed lessons of God Himself, are learned best in the storms of life (compare Psalm 107:23-31). Even in Christ’s storm on the sea of Galilee the disciples were driven to such earnest prayer and dependence through that trial. Whether the storms of life are caused by our own foolishness or not, they are brought for the godly discipline of our souls, that we might come to wholeness, holiness, happiness, and harmony with God in the centre of His will. Storms come upon devout men pursuing their duty, as well as

disobedient men in neglect of duty. God's storms are designed to display worth, wickedness, and/or weakness. Indeed even Jesus Christ, "*learned... obedience through the things which He suffered*".

*"It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I might learn Thy statutes"* (Ps. 119:71).

How swiftly God spun these men right around to glimpse the true light! With what finesse He works! Look well. See how these sailors were not even centre stage here. *Jonah* was! They were peripheral, merely the vehicle of Jonah's flight. Yet Jonah's flight became the vehicle of their introduction to the true God. One might almost be tempted to think that God organized the prophet's rebellion for their sakes. We could never conclude such and be fair with our holy God. But we surely see how deftly God rolls with man's responses, whether in submission or rebellion, accomplishing His purposes through blessing or cursing with every turn of a man's fickle will. Except for Jonah's rebellion, putting him in that boat, these sailors might have remained in darkness to the end of their days. Even so Israel's wicked rejection of Jesus Christ so wonderfully put us in the way of salvation through His death and resurrection.

Now the more Calvinistic types must insist at such

points (either overtly or covertly) that God *caused* the rebellion of the one in order to bring the salvation of the other, making God the Author of evil in some way, shape, or form. You would be wise to reject such teaching. Truth is, the Lord foresees and uses, with amazing clarity and dexterity, what man chooses either for or against Him. Even the wickedness of man the Lord threads into the advancement of His causes. *This* is sovereignty, true sovereignty. God's sovereign rule is not such control that it makes a puppet of a man, and thus by fair extension must free him from accountability for his choices, and effectively transferring blame to God.

In Jonah's rebellion the sailors were won. In Jonah's submission Nineveh was won. Whether in rebellion or submission, *souls were won!* "Great!" you say, "then let's make wicked choices to God's glory and the good of mankind!" "*Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?*" Paul asked. "God forbid!" (Rom. 6:1-2). God forbid that we should ever think that way. For though the Lord can use even our rebellion, He is quite capable and willing to weave our cursing and loss into the fabric as well. Of this Jonah got a belly full! So did the fish.

I cannot help but think how sudden and unexpected

this all was to these sailors. So suddenly they were sailing away rejoicing, like the Ethiopian Eunuch of Acts 8. Can you imagine their response if somebody had told these rough-cut sailors that morning in Joppa that before the day was out they would abandon the religion of their fathers and embrace the Lord God of the Hebrews, a God then unknown to them? Can you picture the knee-slapping hilarity at such a suggestion? All morning they would have had great fun with that one. Until the “*great wind*” first touched their sails and the waves began to rise. How abruptly and unexpectedly God turns the circumstance to turn the man! Do not ever give up on anybody. Do not ever give up on the Lord, for He knows His work. He knows how to instruct and win a soul.

Note well the interesting indications of this effective soul-winning situation. No organized missionary society was involved. No preacher or prophet purposely sent. Mission to mariners appears a side issue, the storm not sent primarily for them, but for the collecting of Jonah. Yet God, in His unsearchable wisdom, brought it all together for their introduction to Himself, and for His glory! How He works, and the wisdom of it, is utterly past finding out. Yet I marvel with such a glimpse into only the surface of it.

*1:15 So they took up Jonah, and cast him forth into the sea: and the sea ceased from her raging.*

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Can you picture the scene on board that ship? What a fearful moment! All had been said that could be said. Their prayers were ended. And in that moment they looked from the heavens to the prophet! What more could they do? Every effort had been expended. Every avenue cut off from them, except the one obvious remaining option. And as the storm perhaps even darkened and seemed to gather greater crushing force, they picked Jonah up and delivered him to the sea, committing him body and soul into the hands of the Creator, certain that within minutes he would surely die in the waves. What else?! Nobody could live out there! It was all they could do.

*“And the sea ceased from her raging”* – Not just the wind, but *“the sea”*. *Can you even imagine it?!* Did the wind and sea slowly begin to lessen until all was calm? Or suddenly so? The terms are similar to when Jesus rebuked the *“great storm of wind”*, saying simply, *“Peace, be still. And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm”* (Mark 4:39). We are given every impression of suddenness. The disciples on the boat with Jesus stood there in the

calm, mouths agape, marvelling at the obedience of wind and waves, saying, “*What manner of man is this, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?*” When Jesus spoke, it did not *begin* to happen, *it just happened!* From howl to hush! From rage to rest! Even so the ceasing here appears immediate, enough to make these men marvel too. It was so clearly supernatural! They knelt there in the deafening silence, utterly astounded, still with a white-knuckled grip on the ship, now unneeded. The wind just stopped! The waves just dropped! The Hebrew word here means to stand still or stop. Can you picture them looking at the sky, the breaking clouds, the now quiet sea, each other, thinking WOW!! God had actually answered their prayer and they were so suddenly delivered from certain death. He had done what no other god could do. None but the Lord!

Then, with their own deliverance assured, perhaps with a start their next thought was of Jonah! And all turned as one, in time to see a massive swirl of the now flat sea, and a colossal fish suddenly break the surface, the horrifying monster taking the screaming man in its huge mouth with one great gulp, and then rolled to plunge into the depths, and Jonah was gone! *It was all just too unreal!* I wonder if with a pang they suddenly felt the loss of that

*1:16 Then the men feared the LORD exceedingly, and offered a sacrifice unto the LORD, and made vows.*

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incredible man in the vast quiet of that moment. For if anything, Jonah had been straight with them. And so bizarre the events happening around that one. I suspect there were many more questions they would like to have asked him, particularly about the Lord.

They had looked through the darkness of the terrible storm and found the sunshine of God's grace. The sun of God's smile shines only after the storm of His just dealing with our sin. The dove of peace only after the Great Flood of evil purged.

But alas, as the Lord had brought these sailors down to a place of terrified humility before they at last looked up, so He continues to bring Jonah down, the only man on board who had yet to look up. See how the "cage" of Jonah's confinement tightens, from the freedom of dry land, to the small dot of a boat deck trapped on a troubled sea, to the tighter confinement of a fish's belly. The Lord closed in, tightening the vice another turn, pressing for repentance. Until rebellion breaks and the man looks up! Until he stops seeking ways out of the

*1:17 Now the LORD had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.*

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Lord's will. This one must be brought a bit lower before he at last turns heavenward. Some must be treated a bit rougher, hit a bit harder, pressed a bit tighter, humiliated a bit deeper. *Their choice!* And God is no respecter of personalities or nationalities in this regard. He took the stubborn Jew the deepest, leaving the humble Gentiles in the calm. Compare the same in the little book of Ruth, with troubled, embittered Jewish Naomi set in contrast to receptive, believing, calm Gentile Ruth. Compare national Israel's stubborn, unreasonable rejection of their own promised Messiah, while responsive, believing Gentiles were often coming in faith to Jesus throughout His earthly ministry. Please do not miss how the Lord was not messing around here! He is deathly serious about this matter of submission and repentance!

Though this was the last these mariners saw of Jonah, I wonder if they ever later heard of him leading in the Nineveh revival. I would not be surprised.

Vs. 17 – *“Now the LORD prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah”* – The matter-of-fact expression of it bespeaks the utter ease with which the Lord handles matters and makes arrangements. Opportunity for repentance had been graciously set before Jonah. He might have responded appropriately on the deck of that boat in the light of day. Yet the Lord in His foreknowledge knew Jonah would not do it. So the fish had been prepared and appointed ahead of time. I wonder, from a human perspective, how many such circling “fish” you and I have avoided by timely humble repentance? See how our loving God of grace spares the praying, penitent ones.

*“To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at My word”* (Isaiah 66:2).

They are the ones calmly sailing up there under happy, peaceful skies. But the Lord was far from through with Jonah! For with his continued stubborn rebellion this one asked to explore even deeper depths of dishonour and discomfort.

Jonah surely expected death, but it did not come. He found his life miraculously preserved in the belly of this great fish (see Ponder Point discussion, page 103, concerning whether Jonah’s life was preserved

in the fish or whether he actually died and was restored to life). Jonah found that his devourer had become his deliverer. God would accomplish both Jonah's preservation and transformation in that fish. What Jonah thought to be the *end*, turned out to be the *answer* to his problem, both short term and long, in this submarine ride to safety.

How often the Lord deals with us in the same way. Circumstances or decisions we are convinced will surely destroy us turn out to be a godsend. As Jonah's fish, the very thing we *had* to have, without which we would have come to ruin, came with menacing cloak. Goliath's threat, when faced with faith, became David's ticket to the throne. Faithful Joseph, so treacherously sold out to slavery and prison in Egypt, landed there at the foot of the stairs up to world dominion. A criminal caught, convicted, and confined finds Jesus Christ in prison, and can then honestly praise God for his "bad luck". From ruin to eternal rescue. What came with the appearance of a ruiner turning out to be the very rescuer from ruin!

Is this not the experience of every saved soul in Jesus Christ as well? We came to the end of ourselves! We died to ourselves when casting our life and hope upon Jesus Christ, and found a

salvation breaking forth into the most joyous peace and rest in our Saviour. Only when we lose our life for His sake do we finally find it, only when we sell our all to obtain the Pearl of greatest price (Matt.13:45-46). Death to self is *life*, not *loss*, for it brings us to fruit and real living (John 12:24-25). Thus even the Lord Himself appeared as our Devourer and Judge, and we, as Isaiah, were *undone* in our sin. But then, praise God, we discovered His wish to be our Saviour, so full of grace! (Acts 10:42-43).

As well, to physically die as a believer in Jesus Christ is to pass through the veil into the glory of His presence. Paul said “*absent from the body . . . present with the Lord*” (II Cor. 5:8). Death is a devourer that becomes the deliverer of the believer from all fear and into God’s presence and peace forevermore. Even so Christ’s anguish and humiliation on the cross turned to His greatest joy and exaltation through that fearful veil of death (Phil. 2:9-11).

The Lord sent an object lesson some time back. While I was spending time with the Lord in His Word and prayer early one morning, a gecko darted out from under a chair and stopped in front of me before hurrying on his way. My fleeting impression was

that the little guy looked a bit thin. We have mosquito netting on the windows and doors of our house, so we have few bugs inside. Not much food for the unfortunate gecko managing to get inside the house. The thought then occurred to me that the humane thing to do would be to catch the poor little beast and put him outside. Now putting yourself in his place for a moment, can you imagine the terrifying ordeal of a huge, hideous monster (me) taking him in what would seem to him a hopeless death grip, all of his kicking and squeaked threats to no avail as I put him out the door? But then actually discovering me to be, not a devouring monster after all, but a merciful messenger of deliverance, sending him on to the wonderful opportunities of a whole new world of bugs. Death in Christ is like that. When God takes His child tenderly but firmly in His grip with a purpose to bring him home, He is not the hideous monster He at first might appear to be, but a blessed messenger of deliverance, transporting us to a world of glorious opportunity.

*“To die is gain”* (Phil. 1:21).

*“Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of His saints”* (Psalm 116:15).

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## Ponder Points

Having come to the end of chapter 1 and having examined each verse, the individual trees, let's step back for a moment and take in the larger view of the forest. There is a very typical way of man with God highlighted so many times in the Bible. It begins with a man choosing the way of **sin**, resulting in his **separation** from God, bringing on his **suffering**, causing the sufferer's heart to cry out to God in **supplication**, which in turn brings **salvation** from the Lord, resulting in a **sacrifice** of praise and thanks to the Lord. There is the pattern; sin, separation, suffering, supplication, salvation, sacrifice. We see this cycle repeated many times throughout the book of Judges. Now let's apply this typical pattern to the characters we have met so far in Jonah's blessed little book.

**The sailors** – Were without the true God in their **sin**, and thus **separated** from Him. Their **suffering** was in the crisis on the sea, brought to their very wit's end. Their **supplication** was in their earnest, sincere, humble cry to the Lord in the storm. Their **salvation** when the sea “stood”. And their **sacrifice** immediately followed, with their vows offered to the true God.

**Jonah** – His **sin** was his rebellious flight from the Lord. His **separation** in that he fled “*from the presence of the LORD*” (3 times in vs. 3 & 10). Jonah was no longer on speaking terms with the Lord, for we see no prayer. His **suffering** was also the crises at sea aimed squarely at him, yet still no cry to the Lord. Thus furthering **suffering** in the fish-meal. His **supplication** finally comes in chapter 2, “*then Jonah prayed*” (vs. 1). His **salvation** is in his preservation alive in the fish, and then vomited up on dry land. And finally his **sacrifice** is found in 2:9.

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Do not miss how severely the Lord deals with His wayward child. And if He does not so deal with me in my backsliding, then I must question whether I am His child at all.

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As I have mentioned earlier, many have been those struggling with the believability of this whole scene of Jonah’s preservation in the fish’s belly. It is hard to understand why the struggle, since one miracle is as impossible as another from a human perspective. The critics, to be consistent, must reject all miracles. Yet perhaps part of the difficulty is in the *nature* of the miracle. There is a rather base, earthy, grotesque, unsophisticated feel about

this miracle. When Jesus raises the dead or opens blind eyes we are impressed. We marvel in such works, for Jesus is cast into a heroic light. But when a man is swallowed alive by a huge fish, it may seem to lend itself to fairy-tale, Aesop's fable sort of stuff, seemingly in the same vein as Greek or Roman mythology. And in fact we are presented with a most unheroic, humiliating sort of scene, stirring amusement more than admiration.

But then, does this account not come to us much like Jesus did, in surprisingly common clothes? And as with Jesus, proud men are stirred to scorn and rejection. But was it not the Lord of glory who did this miracle, and told us about it? So I believe it! Simple! It seems to me all concern and doubt is removed when we consider those words, "*Now the Lord had prepared a great fish*". Does this not put an end to all controversy?

Perhaps the miracle is not so much that Jonah could be swallowed by a large fish and live, for there are reports from natural history of such occurrences. Fishies come that big! The miracle was perhaps more in Jonah's preservation in the fish. What air could he breathe? What could he drink? But then, what of the miraculous preservation of Jesus in His 40-day temptation in

the wilderness, of Moses 40 days up on Mt. Sinai, of Elijah's 40-day journey to Horeb on the food the angel gave. Clearly the Lord supernaturally preserved Jonah alive in that place specially prepared for him in the event of his continual stubborn rebellion. If the Lord prepared the fish, then the Lord made it adequate. ***Sceptics be gone!***

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## **Thoughts for the Young**

Was Jonah submissive or obedient? No. God sent him east and Jonah fled west. Very simply God had a job that He wanted Jonah to do, and Jonah said "No!" Not with his tongue, but with his feet. Did you know you can talk with your feet? Or with your hands? When one of our sons was a baby he would sometimes reach for something he should not touch, and I would say "no". Well his little head would then spin around to look at me, pulling his hand away. Then he would look again at that forbidden object, then back at me, back to the magnetic object. And then that little hand would sometimes begin to reach again. That precious little hand, lining itself up for a smack, was *speaking* in that move. It too was saying "no", just like Jonah's feet.

Any child who says “no” to his parents, either in word or act, should be spanked, and this is just what God did with His child. Jonah received a hiding like few others have in the Bible record. Oh the Lord did not use His hand or a stick. He used a terrible experience. He took up the rod of storm and sea. Haggai the prophet tells how the Lord later used the rods of mildew & mice, hail & gale, drought & dearth upon the rebellious nation of Israel. God has all kinds of “rods”. His messengers to punish cannot be counted for multitude. Did Jonah think he would find refuge in the sea? God turned the sea against Him. Would Peter escape the Lord’s purpose, running back to his fishing? The fish were scattered away from him. God just will not allow His children to say “no” to something He tells them to do. So God punished His child here, and He did so very severely. Then He just sent Jonah right back do what He told him to do in the first place anyway. All Jonah gained for his cheek was a hiding, escaping nothing but his own peace.

Why does the Lord do this? Why does He punish disobedience? Because He’s a *mean* God? Does a parent punish their child out of hate? No. Proverbs 13:24 says, “*He that spares his rod hates his son; but he that loves him chastens him betimes (early or diligently)*”. Compare Proverbs 3:11-12. The Lord

punishes because He loves, but in His love His punishment can be very severe, as any loving parent will do. The Bible is full of accounts of God's hidings for disobedience;

- Almost the entire world of evil men was destroyed in Noah's fearful Flood.
- The earth swallowed the rebellious sons of Korah.
- Poisonous serpents were allowed to bite God's grumbling children in the wilderness.
- God's people were often taken into captivity by other nations because of their waywardness.
- Ananias & Sapphira died very suddenly for their lie to the Holy Spirit.
- Nadab & Abihu died suddenly as well for their incaution to honour things sacred to the Lord.
- The cities of Sodom & Gomorrah were consumed with fire, ending suddenly for their evil.
- The Canaanite nations were nearly wiped out because their wickedness had come to the full.

Can you think of other Bible examples? God is severe in His hidings. May it never be that you should need to be spanked by God.

The way of peace is in our ready submission to God's will and words. Look well to the example of Jesus Christ who came expressly to do the will of His Father, with the result that He is highly exalted above every name! And of course the Bible is full of other examples of submission as well;

- Isaiah humbly cried, "*Here am I, send me*".
- Young Samuel said, "*Speak for Thy servant heareth*".
- Saul of Tarsus responded with, "*Lord what wilt Thou have me to do*".

Just look at how blessed such lives and how mightily the Lord used such true and tender hearts for His glory!

Now what if the Lord made His will for you clear? Would you quickly bow your heart to His word and follow His way? Yet has He not already made His will for you known in so many ways? He wants you to personally "*believe on the Lord Jesus Christ*". Have you done that? His words speak of our need to be baptized after we are saved. He has

commanded us to walk with Him in fellowship and prayer. Is this your way? He desires of us that we cherish His Word. He expects of us that we speak for Him of what we have found in Jesus Christ our Saviour. He has commissioned us in our going into all the world, that we make disciples along the way.

*“Then I said,  
I am cast out of Thy sight;  
yet I will look again  
toward Thy holy temple”*

*(Jonah 2:4)*

## Chapter 2

### *The Repentant, Returning Prophet*

#### *Jonah in the Fish*

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*2:1 Then Jonah prayed unto the LORD his God out of the fish's belly*

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How exceedingly precious these very first words.

*“Then Jonah prayed”*

*At last* Jonah prayed!! He keeps us waiting no longer. Oh I am so glad for Jonah that he did. I shudder to think of what next had this harsher measure failed. The Lord knows how to do this, how to bring this response. He knows how to make life very unpleasant. Jonah's heart surely screamed for an end to this chapter in the story of his flight. But he only came to victory in these moments when finally he cried out to God. When at last his heart was mastered, he had the heart of the Master. It was never a matter of his personal merits, only a question of his penitent cry. Why are we so foolishly slow to listen or respond? Why must the Lord hit a man between the eyes with a plank before he finally turns to Him?

*“Then Jonah prayed”*

Jonah, the rebel, prayed and was heard. The one so unworthy of a hearing. The one refusing to respond even to the Lord’s howling rebuke in the storm. Jonah, the fleeing prodigal, who did not deserve a loving Father ready to embrace him upon his return.

*“Then Jonah prayed”*

No prayer of moaning complaint do we hear, as we might expect. Not even of petition or appeal. We find no request or demand or plea from Jonah throughout this chapter 2 prayer, though he was in a situation of greatest need. It seems he is done with using the Lord. Instead Jonah’s prayer is characterized by an atmosphere of gratitude, more a psalm of thanksgiving recounting the perils of his circumstance and the Lord’s gracious deliverance when finally he cried. Though yet to be delivered, Jonah was already thanking the Lord. When has a man ever faced as hideous and humiliating a situation as Jonah found himself in? He could have gone in any number of directions at this point. He could have fallen into paralysing despair or depression as Elijah’s *“O Lord, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers”* (I Ki. 19). He could have shrugged his shoulders as Eli, in

careless indifference (I Sam. 3). With a sigh, just, “Ah well, the Lord will do what He will do.” He could have seethed in anger as Cain’s fist lifted to the Lord, with “*My punishment is greater than I can bear*” (Gen. 4). Oh we will see a touch of Elijah and Cain in Jonah later in chapter 4, but not here. Instead he yielded completely to the One who loves him best, the One who loved him enough to press him to this repentance. Jonah first found deliverance and peace of soul before his physical deliverance to come, his heart so filled with thanksgiving. He came to the very place to which all of God’s good discipline seeks to move a man. Happy the one who comes to complete surrender, that blessedness expressed at the beginning of those portraits in the Psalms of a godly man;

Psalm 112:1 – “*Blessed is the man that feareth the LORD, that delighteth greatly in His commandments.*”

Psalm 128:1 – “*Blessed is every one that feareth the LORD; that walketh in His ways.*”

***Oh happy man*** who surrenders wholly to the Lord!

Note as well how Jonah prayed to “*the LORD his God*” (vs. 1), and “*my God*” (vs. 6). Hey, *Jonah is back!* In spite of his rebellious abandonment, he

knew now that the Lord had not abandoned *him*. This was doubly evident in the Lord's most aggressive pursuit of him. He is still *his* God, *my* God! If He were not, there would be no such pursuit or punishment. Praise God for His punishments, if only for their proof that He is "*my God*" (Heb. 12:5-8). Even as the prodigal son, when repentance and resolve finally came in that far off land. In his destitute condition he resolved "*I will arise and go to my father*" (Lk. 15:18). He was still a son of his father. He could never lose that relation.

Now behold how Jonah prayed "*out of the fish's belly*". Never has there been a humbler house of prayer. Makes me wonder what High Church folks would say about this, where all must be done in the appropriate place, where all is stuffy, laced, and tasselled, where all must be done in the appropriate way. Here was a man who just cried out! From Low Church. The *lowest* in fact! From the depths of the sea. From the belly of a beast. From lowest humiliation. Yea, from "*the bottoms of the mountains*" (vs. 6). And brother, that prayer soared higher than any lofty textbook one ever could. For it reached to God. It won His attention and drew His release. Look well how the genuinely praying soul, *turned, penitent, yielded, and genuinely so*, can reach the heart of the most High from places of

earth *most low*.

Behold how Jonah's praying presence there made that most shameful, simplest, rudest structure a house of prayer, indeed a place of holy communion with "*his God*". It is what I tell the prisoners with whom we correspond. The place does not make the heart. The heart makes the place. With a right heart, the most barren and blighted of places becomes the most blessed. "Praise God for prison," I hear them say, "for I met my Saviour, and learned to praise God here".

But oh I sense reproof and warning here in Jonah's example. Reproof for we who "cannot find the time" to pray to God in far more comfortable, convenient surroundings. Is it not true that the workshop, the office, the car, the bedroom are more likely places to talk with God than a fish's belly? Yet "*my people have forgotten Me days without number*" (Jer. 2:32). "Oh they talk *about* talking to Me", says the Lord. How often He must bring His people to the edges of Jonah's experience before they will actually, finally talk *to* Him. Since the Lord could not get Jonah to turn or talk to Him on the boat *on* the sea, He put him in the beast *in* the sea, and there got action. God is serious about commitment and communion with Him. He is quite willing for strong, painful

*2:2 And said, I cried by reason of mine affliction unto the LORD, and He heard me; out of the belly of hell cried I, and Thou heardest my voice.*

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measures to this end. He left the prodigal son destitute and stripped of all earthly future. He left Naomi the same, stripped of every heir. He took Abraham's dad, to drive His servant on to full obedience. He pressed David, through conviction, to the point of physical distress (Ps. 32 & 51). So we as loving parents must be willing for strong, painful measures toward bringing our children to right. True love is willing to distress love's object.

Vs. 2 – *“Then Jonah prayed”,* and more than prayed! He *“cried by reason of mine affliction”*. As with the prayer of the storm-tossed sailors, nothing half-hearted here. The Lord uses trials and troubles to gather earnestness to our prayers. Let's face it, we take our ease when the sky is bright and the waves of life are pleasant ripples before a refreshing breeze. We are often indifferent to the true meaning of life in times of ease and happiness. And if earnest desire to please the Lord and yearning after His way and heart comes only with the reeling ship and crashing waves, well then do not marvel when your number is called, and what you have ordered through indifference is served. *Our God* is the

meaning of life! He *is* life – *our* life – *all of it!* Heart, soul, mind, and strength!

*“And He heard me . . . and Thou heardest my voice”* – “Oh to grace, how great a debtor”. The Lord had been disobeyed, rebelled against, despised, and forsaken. Yet still His ear was open to the humble prayer of His returning child. He is attentive, not just to the close-walking submissive child, but to the penitent back-slider too! He is so like the forsaken father of that prodigal son, waiting, watching, hoping...and then at last running, embracing, feeding, refreshing. As the Lord’s almighty wrath is poised and ready to fall upon the stubborn sinner, so His heart, so full of compassion, is poised and yearning and ready to meet and embrace every slightest returning in His wayward child.

*“The hand of our God is upon all them for good that seek Him, but His power and His wrath is against all them that forsake Him”* (Ezra 8:22).

The finest of friends is the Lord...and the fiercest of enemies! After all of this Jonah finally cried out in prayer, and his God was there, and was still *“his God”*. And *“his God”* was there with power to help. A caring friend might be there in your tempest too, wringing his hands with sincerest concern, wishing

he could understand, wanting to help, longing for the wisdom to know what to do and the ability to do it. Like sitting with the neighbour whose husband has just shot himself, or with the man whose wife has just been suddenly, tragically killed. Feeling helpless, and able to do little more than cry with them. But none is like the Lord. His help is able, adequate, sufficient, wise, right, knowing, appropriate, timely. Who is like the Lord in your deepest distress? His *power* the perfect complement to His *pity*. Both *immeasurable!* No circumstance ever troubles Him or prevents His help.

Now I want you to notice something in Jonah's chapter 2 prayer. It is largely made up of snippets from Psalms;

- **Vs. 2** – Ps. 120:1 – “*In my distress I cried unto the Lord, and He heard me.*” God hears.
- **Vs. 3** – Ps. 42:7 – “. . . *all Thy waves and Thy billows are gone over me.*” God tries us.
- **Vs. 4** – Ps. 31:22 – “*For I said in my haste, I am cut off from before Thine eyes: nevertheless Thou heardest the voice of my supplications when I cried unto Thee*”. God punishes.
- **Vs. 5** – Ps. 69:1-2 – “*Save me, O God; for the*

waters are come in unto my soul . . . I am come into deep water, where the floods overflow me.” Overwhelming heartache.

- **Vs. 7a** – Ps. 142:3 – “When my spirit was overwhelmed within me, then Thou knewest my path.” God’s awareness of me at my lowest. Also Ps. 42:6 – “O my God, my soul is cast down within me; therefore will I remember Thee”.
- **Vs. 7b** – Ps. 18:6 – “In my distress I called upon the Lord, and cried unto my God: He heard my voice out of His temple, and my cry came before Him, even into His ears.” My cry reaches to Him. Compare Psalm 120:1.
- **Vs. 9a** – Ps. 50:14 – “Offer unto God thanksgiving; and pay thy vows unto the most High.” Example of givenness. Also 116:17-18 – “**I will offer to Thee the sacrifice of thanksgiving, and will call upon the name of the Lord. I will pay my vows unto the Lord now in the presence of all His people.**”
- **Vs. 9b** – Ps. 3:8 – “Salvation belongeth unto the Lord.” Our sole source of salvation.

Interwoven with Jonah’s own thoughts are these many phrases from Psalms, phrases expressing his

heart better than his own words ever could. In his great distress these words of God ran to his comfort, expressing his soul. Shades of Romans 8:26 here;

*“Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.”*

When a soul is absolutely shattered, overwhelmed with “infirmity”, “*the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us*”. The Spirit of God put the words to Jonah’s heart here, through the words of the Psalms, which are the words of the Spirit who gave the Book (II Pet. 1:21). Is this not exactly what Jesus did in His distress too? “*My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?*”, with the rest of Psalm 22 expressing all of His anguish and hope. “*For the zeal of Thine house hath eaten Me up*” (Ps. 69:9), with the context of these spoken words expressing the passion of Christ’s heart. “*The reproaches of them that reproached Thee are fallen upon Me*” (Ps. 69:9b). Throughout the ages the godly have found in the Psalms the perfect expression of the anguish, longing, and emotion of their heart, especially in times of great pain or loss or distress. It is the expression of the godly heart in the midst of the battles and heartaches the godly will most certainly face.

Good thing Jonah had his Bible with him, hey? Pretty quick thinking to grab that ol' Book before he went over the side, and his torch too! Of course the obvious is that Jonah was carrying the Psalms *inside* of him. He knew his Bible. His mind or memory was full of God's words stored within. Therefore in a time of greatest distress those blessed words could express what was in him, becoming the backbone of his prayer, and displaying where he had lived in his heart prior. Jonah found real help in expressing his heart to God with God's own words. The Lord had already said it better than His troubled child could. God's words become our own in such times as this. Learn well the lesson here!

*“For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope”* (Rom. 15:4).

Folks, it is the way of the godly or Spirit-filled. They are full of God's words. Or as Paul termed it, they are “rich” in His words (Col. 3:16). This is ever their delight. They drink long and deep of its comforts and instruction. They *do* not, *will* not, *could* not neglect it, especially in the darkest hours. Compare Christ's words in John 14:21 & 23;

*“He that hath My commandments and keepeth them* [excluding mere hearers and talkers], *he it is that*

*loveth Me [lit. “that one is the one loving Me”]; and he that loveth Me shall be loved of My Father, and I will love him, and will manifest Myself to him.” (vs. 21). “If a man love Me, he will keep My words: and My Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him” (vs. 23).*

What tremendous promises for one having and keeping the Lord’s words! What was inside Jonah came out when he came to trouble. We discover in this chapter where his heart had long dwelt prior to this event, and likely having everything to do with why he came at last to yieldedness and comfort.

Perhaps you would say, “Well yes, of course, but then Jonah was a preacher or prophet, so he *had* to know the Book”. I have had that one thrown at me. “You know God’s words in a larger measure because you are a pastor.” In other words, my consuming of God’s words is because of my position, which of course lets men of all other professions off the hook of responsibility. But is it interest because of position, or position because of interest? Love because of labour, or labour because of love? I’m afraid I am the way I am in my interest in God’s Word because it is right and it is in me, not because of certificates on my office wall or salary checks. Cultivate greatest interest in God’s words and seek to instil the same interest in your children. See that

His words are held in highest esteem and of vital importance within your family experience. Do your best to fill your hearts with it, and to show the reality of His words in your own life. Put your family here in church as a non-negotiable, and awake, and listening when we meet around God's words as I attempt to teach my family. It was the few early years John Newton's mother had with him before her death that made the difference in that young reprobate in his later years. God used His words, so faithfully implanted in Newton's heart in his earliest years, to rescue him from utter decadence and to send him out the other end of his earthly existence as a fruitful pastor for the Lord. Correct ultimate responses have everything to do with where our thoughts have dwelt. This is the hope in portions such as Proverbs 22:6 and Deuteronomy 6.

Now think for moment of how Jonah would likely have learned these words of God he now quotes in prayer, flowing from his distressed heart. These were psalms, all of them! Phrases out of the old hymnbook from which they sang in church, to put it in modern terms. These phrases of God's Word were likely committed to memory through consistent attendance at temple worship. And the words of these noble songs stuck with Jonah and now come to his comfort in his distress, and feature

2:3 *For Thou hadst cast me into the deep, in the midst of the seas; and the floods compassed me about: all Thy billows and Thy waves passed over me.*

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so prominently in his penitent return. Do you see the importance of the Lord's songs, especially the words? Words barely discernible over the tempest of much of modern "Christian music". What is the glory of the Lord's song, put to the folly of the world's wrong, going to do for me at "*the bottoms of the mountains*"? How is such rhythmic rot and riot going to help me out of my defiant departure? Such choral chaos in fact *depicts* defiant departure in and of itself! It comes right out of the world's expression of rebellion. Please think carefully upon such thoughts in our day of modern church musical manure, coming with little more than sensual appeal. Consider the surpassing worth of the Lord's psalms and songs for a troubled heart.

*"All Thy billows and Thy waves passed over me"* – Listen carefully for Jonah's clear awareness of the Lord's hand in what had happened. The billows and waves, like the sailors and storm, were merely instruments in the Lord's hand, servants of His wrath to punish sin. This was no accident, no chance happening. This was no man's fault or the

doing of the sailors. This was not a matter of Jonah's advice. Jonah is wise to see all such thoughts stripped away, seeing only that it was *the hand of God!* This was between him and the Lord, only. It is a point we are wise to not lose sight of. The Apostle Paul often found himself in prison for his faith, yet he never referred to himself in such circumstances as a prisoner of Nero or of Rome or of man. Always he was a prisoner of the Lord Jesus Christ (Eph. 3:1; 4:1; II Tim. 1:8; Philemon 1 & 9). Happy the man who sees beyond the immediate circumstances to the mighty, loving hand of God. Happy the man who allows the Lord to open the eyes of his faith, like Elisha's servant, to see beyond the angry army to God's angels surrounding the surrounds. How clear Job's insight in his calamity of all calamities, responding with, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord" (Job 1:21). Ezra was assured of God's own hand "*upon all them for good that seek Him*". But how well he knew that "*His power and His wrath is against all them that forsake Him.*" (Ezra 8:22). Don't you know it Jonah! And how very *severe* that disciplining hand! Severe, yet corrective, and designed to bring Jonah back. Designed to firmly impress on Jonah the foolishness of ever disobeying again. So it is with all good discipline, bearing a twofold thrust, to *punish past*

*2:4 Then I said, I am cast out of Thy sight; yet I will look again toward Thy holy temple.*

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unfaithfulness and to *prevent future* unfaithfulness. In tragedy we often want to name the cause and ascribe faults, and point fingers, mostly away from our own hide. But nothing touches you at any point, but for God.

*“Then I said, I am cast out of Thy sight”* – Words spoken in agony. Now for the first time Jonah so keenly felt the loss of the Lord’s presence and care, that special place of fellowship and friendship in the light reserved for those walking with Him (Jn. 14:21, 23), for those who dwell *“in the secret place of the most High”* (Ps. 91:1). Jonah had lost that blessed abode. Only now, as his dulled heart finally awakened to sensitivity in his returning, only now did it really begin to matter. How little he cared what the Lord thought before, but now he cared so very much. Now at last, he recognized what a darkness it is to be apart from the Lord. Not loss of salvation, but loss of friendship. Cut off, cast out, banished *by* God, *from* God, through Jonah’s sin of disobedience. Yes, the Lord turns from us when we turn from Him.

*“But your iniquities have separated between you and*

2:5 *The waters compassed me about, even to the soul:  
the depth closed me round about, the weeds were  
wrapped about my head.*  
2:6 *I went down to the bottoms of the mountains; the  
earth with her bars was about me for ever: yet hast  
Thou brought up my life from corruption, O LORD  
my God.*

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*your God, and your sins have hid His face from you,  
that He will not hear” (Isa. 59:2).*

The Lord hides His face from sin until He sees genuine repentance and confession. Jonah knew the hope of this in his turning. He at last so *wanted* to be restored.

*“Yet I will look again toward Thy holy temple”* – The heart of repenting David was now in this one (Ps. 51), and so the blessedness of forgiven David (Ps. 32) was now dawning upon his soul. The Lord was just and right in treating him so, casting Jonah out of His presence, since he had fled out. But now, as his heart returns, Jonah feels it his bitterest sorrow to be so deprived of God. That blessed presence he had considered a burden, from which he had desired to escape, now has become all of his longing and hope. It is no longer just his sorry situation filling all his scope. *It is God*, and restoration to Him, all of his concern, in all of his thoughts!

The images of bondage impress me in vs. 5-6. “*The waters compassed me about*” (vs. 5). Surrounded, engulfed (compare vs. 3). “*The depth closed me round about*”. “*The earth with her bars was about me forever*” (vs. 6). As if not only cast out and shut off from the *Lord*, but from the *earth* as well, from the land of the living, from solid ground, and that “*forever*”. Its bars shut against him lest he ever return. He was overwhelmed with a feeling of bondage. He was bound in the consequences of his foolish departure. Even to the detail of entangling seaweed “*wrapped around my head*” (vs. 5).

**“Freedom from oppressive bondage”** is sin’s motto as it flees from the presence of the Lord. “I want to be free from shackling discipline, from God’s oppressive commands, from parental expectations, from every outward discipline.” Oh how the rebel chafes at such nasty words as authority, control, discipline, expectations, responsibility! Yet little does the rebel know that he merely swaps masters in his flight from God, the gracious for the treacherous. Hey, the tempter did not inform you on that feature, did he?!

Jonah wanted freedom from God’s demands and sought to escape. But alas, he escaped...to bondage, right down to the seaweed wrapped about

his head. The Lord, through Paul in Galatians, defined the balance when explaining how in Christ we “*have been called unto liberty*”, yet a liberty that will “*by love serve one another*” (5:13). We are freed from sin to serve the Lord by our loving service of others. And we have been freed from sin to become “*the servants of righteousness*” (Romans 6:16-22 & 7:1-6). Jesus never promised a yokeless existence. He said, “*take My yoke upon you*”, for it is easy and light, and that compared to sin’s heavy burden!! In fact, from ancient days the Lord has taught that “*the way of the wicked is hard*” (Prov. 13:15). Satan is such a desperate liar. He says “Rebel and be free”, “Rebel and you will arise”, “You will be like God”, “You will advance”, “You will be so much better off”, “You will not die!” Truth is, when man rebels in pride something dies, and he is brought to ruin. He is shocked to hear the clasp of the lock and the clink of the chain, and the gleeful laugh of that great deceiver. In fact there is a sense in which the proud-heart falls to a *beastlike* existence (Dan. 4). Sin led Jonah straight into a bondage hopelessly bigger than he could handle. His only hope for deliverance in the Lord.

It is interesting to see how Jonah seesaws up and down between hope and hopelessness in verses 2-7. Though his troubles seemed to shut out all hope,

2:7 *When my soul fainted within me I remembered the LORD: and my prayer came in unto Thee, into Thine holy temple.*

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and he was so overwhelmed, yet his faith revived when he “*remembered the LORD*”. David expressed the same principle in Psalm 42:5-6,

*“Why art thou cast down, O my soul? And why art thou disquieted in me? (↓) Hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise Him for the help of His countenance (↑). O my God, my soul is cast down within me (↓): therefore will I remember Thee” (↑).*

Though lower than the lowest, “I remembered the Lord”. Forgetting is fretting. Remembering is rejoicing. If you know the Lord, then here is depression’s answer, and an answer He proclaims quite enough. If you do not know Him, the answer is to find your refuge in Him through Jesus Christ, the only Saviour of men. Make an appointment for a Holmes-Rahe Stress Scale evaluation if you want. Perhaps a touch of homeopathic treatment would bring relief. Schedule a Guttenheimer’s Ink Spot personality assessment if some insist it will help. Many are the depression medications seemingly qualified men are quick to prescribe. Indeed the smelly depth of psycho-folly available out there

2:8 *They that observe lying vanities forsake their own mercy.*

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deepens by the day, even some with the faintest scent of Christianity about them. But God's way of encouragement to every troubled heart is right here.

*“Remember Him . . . hope thou in God”*. Psycho-programmes be gone! And with them all of the personality tests, blame-shifting pseudo-syndromes, personality development schemes, positive thinking counsels, etc. It is less the *what* to do, more the *Who*. Perfect peace is still available for the one *“whose mind is stayed on Thee”* (Isa. 26:3), for *“Thou wilt keep him”*! The promise is still in the Book my friend. And we are not talking of brief heart flicks here, but of the heart's domicile or place of dwelling, your ongoing attitude toward your God. We could perhaps put Philippians 4:6 beside Jonah 2:7, and into the same family as Psalm 42 and Isaiah 26:3. And throw in Psalm 37 as well, that Psalm that repeatedly commands us to stop stirring ourselves to the unrest of bitterness, calling us rather to trust and delight and rest in the Lord.

Such a heart-wrenching statement in vs. 8, spoken by one who understood by experience. Let me first

focus on a couple of the words in this verse for the sake of our better understanding. “*Observe*” expresses the idea of earnest attention upon something. The Hebrew word translated “*vanities*” carries the idea of breath, breeze, wind, mist, thus something empty or impotent. Even the word behind “*lying*” mingles the thought of emptiness or nothing with the idea of falsehood. Thus “*lying vanities*” are hollow lies, things that disappoint the hope one places upon them. Much like a hammock you trusted that dropped you, or a chair that collapsed under your weight, or a boat that will not float you, sinking the moment you stepped into it. Lying, in the sense of showing some promise on the surface, but then proving useless when trusted. So the picture here is of folks who pursue false, empty trusts with the most eager focus. The earnest practitioners of the false religions of this world offer ample example. Men who devote earnest attention to promising but quite empty nothingnesses. “*Clouds without water*” is the way Jude described such empty expectations. Promising mists bringing only disappointment. It is a term sometimes used to refer to the vain emptiness of idols. This is illustrated so well in the useless false gods of those sailors when their need of them became most desperate, yet *disappointed!* Like a dead fire extinguisher that you did not know was useless,

until it was really needed. You always knew it was there, its presence a point of confidence for you. Until the day of the fire! Or like a stone life-preserver. You often felt a little surge of comfort knowing it hung there on the side of the dock. Until the day of the drowning, when you grabbed it and gave it a heave and it just sank. It had always looked right, all painted up white and properly labelled. It appeared for all the world like a genuinely useful rescue tool. But it let you down in the crunch. The thought here is of any *worthless* thing one might put his trust in, against or cross-purposes to the Lord. Any superstition. Any pet idea. Any possession or luxury or earthly pursuit. Any idol. Any sparkling talent or clever evasion. Anything human or earthly. Any disciplined regimen or ritual. Any psycho(i)logical treatment. Anything one might choose to place his trust in above the Lord. Jonah had made this mistake, the blunder of trusting in his own judgment, trusting in escape, trusting in a boat, trusting in the sea, in distance, in flight. He had foolishly elevated his own ideas and desires, thinking his own views better than God's. And oh how he was let down, and hard, in more ways than one! Jonah sailed right into one of those promising disappointments. He thought direction and distance might do it. "*Lying vanities!*" He removed his life from God's care, quite

determined to direct it himself. With God's ideas not to his liking, he had become his own pilot. He thought that would cover the crisis of God's call. *"Lying vanities!"* He had left the Psalmist's restful resolve, *"Some trust in chariots, and some in horses [and some in boats]: but we will remember the name of the Lord our God"* (Ps. 20:7).

*"And hope maketh not ashamed [does not disappoint or put to shame]; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts thru the Holy Spirit which is given unto us"* (Rom. 5:5).

When our hope is rightly placed, there is no disappointment. Jonah had discovered that to cling to any empty nothingness is to court disappointment. It is to cut off all hope of blessing from the only One who can mercy us. But to trust the Lord is to never be put to shame.

*"O Lord, the hope of Israel, all that forsake Thee shall be ashamed [disappointed]"* (Jer. 17:13).

*"Behold, I lay in Sion a stumblingstone and rock of offence [in Jesus Christ]: and whosoever believeth on Him shall not be ashamed"* (Rom. 9:33).

*"Whosoever believeth on Him [Jesus] shall not be ashamed"* (Rom. 10:11, quoting Isa. 28:16).

2:9 *But I will sacrifice unto Thee with the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay that that I have vowed. Salvation is of the LORD.*

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You turn from the only answer in the Lord and run from His will and you forsake mercy, *your own mercy!* See how the very idea of the Lord is identified now with mercy in Jonah's mind. Estrangement from God, through the pursuit of promising but empty hopes, now seems to him estrangement from his own well-being and happiness.

Now are you going to believe Jonah or your hormones, my brother, my sister? Will you trust the words of God or those of your mother or father or friend or conventional wisdom? Wrong passions do not require fulfilment. They require curbing, so stop it! Turn and walk away! Wrong advice deserves only to be wisely ignored. If it does not square with the Word it is likely crooked, and is but another hollow hope leading on to shame and disappointment.

Vs. 9 – *“But I will sacrifice unto Thee with the voice of thanksgiving”* – We now find Jonah in the same place we left the sailors in 1:16, offering sacrifices

*2:10 And the LORD spake unto the fish, and it vomited out Jonah upon the dry land.*

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and making vows. Sacred vows such as, “You alone I will love and serve”, “To You I will look”, “For You I will live”, “You I will obey, for You Yourself are my salvation”.

*“Salvation is of the LORD”* – As Peter’s, *“Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life”* (John 6:68). Who else in all of creation shall we look to for what only You can give? One writer referred to this expression as “a miniature Bible”, for it encompasses the Bible’s theme, man’s need of salvation and the Lord’s goal and provision in His blessed Redeemer.

The Lord’s servant has been disciplined, with a hiding far worse than a wooden paddle could ever bring. Jonah had been lovingly but firmly brought to yieldedness. Therefore the Lord released him from his prison. When Jonah at last let go of his demand to go his own way, the Lord let go of *Jonah!* That was the deal.

Vs. 10 – *“And the LORD spake unto the fish”* – Note how when the time came, it was with such

simplicity that the Lord merely spoke to that big fish and Jonah was ejected onto the shore of Palestine. A 26-verse ordeal it was (chapters 1-2), bending the man to yieldedness before the Lord! *One word* to the beast and it did what it was told! Even so the lions in the den of Daniel 6 (“You won’t eat this one for supper, but I have the most wonderful breakfast lined up for you”). The Lord speaks to only two of His created beings in this little book, Jonah and the fish. One just did what it was told, and that against its very nature to give up food (as Elijah’s raven attendants in I Ki. 17), and the other had to be forced to it through terribly troubled waters. Would to God we were as responsive to Him as His other creatures. Only people and angels (fallen) refuse the Lord it seems. I remember once observing through the window a dragonfly on the burglar bars outside my office window. It sat there looking so poised and ready to instantly fly. I was reminded of God’s good angels so poised and ready to fly in an instant to His bidding. What of you and me? Is it a picture of our readiness to respond to the Lord?

Now picture for a moment spit-up Jonah standing there on the beach. Bleached and gross and stinking of fish, outwardly perhaps. Do you think that mattered to the Lord? The *outward* matters so much less than the *inward* to Him. This one had

been restored to the Lord's fellowship, and *that was all of it!*

Can you imagine what was in Jonah's heart at that moment? *He was rescued!* The solid ground for which he had been so wishing never felt so good under His feet. There was amazement. There was joy. And as well, there was surely a firm resolve in him that never would he forsake God again like that, a holy fear of ever so grieving the Lord again. If we could have been there to ask the prophet what advice he might offer for the generations following, I think I know what he likely would have said, standing there so ragged and worn. "Do yourself a favour and do what our God says! Do not be slow to get clearly what He is saying, and then to follow through and do it. Let there be a healthy fear in you of ever doing otherwise. You ever make the mistake of turning your attention to trust in empty, lying nothingnesses and brother, you forsake your own mercy!"

Look well how the Lord brought Jonah right back to the starting (departing) place of the Palestinian shore. He had it to do anyway! *Hard* way or *easy* way! Your choice! How much easier it would have been if Jonah had simply obeyed the first time and saved himself a packet of trouble like few have ever

experienced. The only reasonable type of response to the Lord is;

*“Lo I come . . . to do Thy will O God”* (Jesus, quoting David, Hebrews 10:7).

*“Speak, for thy servant heareth”* (Samuel, I Sam. 3).

*“Lord, what would you have me to do?”* (Saul, Acts 9).

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## **Ponder Points**

Consider some parallels between Jonah and the nation of Israel;

- Both were called of God to be a light to the Gentiles.
- Both denied that call out of bitter distaste for the Gentiles.
- Both were severely chastised for their rebellion, brought to the very threshold of extinction. The nation of Israel has been oppressed for centuries, with precious little ease, in constant danger and fear. It has been for them just as the Lord promised it would be if they forsook Him (Deut. 4:25-29; 28:64-67). The Lord has been clear in His warning

and faithful in His follow-through.

- Both were supernaturally preserved through God's chastisement, the same hand bringing both their punishment and their preservation.
- Both find God's relief when finally they cry to Him. As with Jonah, the Lord seeks to drive Israel to a tender, submissive, penitent heart before Him. Indeed the coming day is already written on God's prophetic calendar when "*they shall look upon Me [Messiah] whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn...*" (Zech. 12:10). As accomplished in Jonah, so the Lord throughout the ages presses His people to the clear, fixed understanding that "*Salvation is of the Lord!*"

Even today, though back in their land, Israel is surrounded by bitterest enemies. The very fact that Israel is still on the map is nothing short of miraculous, when you consider the host of seething powers all around her. But God's chosen people have yet to fully grasp that "*salvation is of the Lord*". They look for solutions political and military, making concessions, giving away national real estate, land that is their land! But the Muslim menace seems only to increase, for the moment, only for the moment. Forces are gathering around

that brave little nation pinned against the sea. But it is *the Lord* who is pressing, pressing, pressing her, as He pressed the sailors, as He pressed Jonah – moving in, cutting off options, driving her to finally throw off all dependence on human trusts, finally to cry out, as Jonah, in utter reliance upon Him. No release from the prison of their own making, until complete yieldedness to the Lord God of Jacob! And with that eventual surrender, peace like a river will flow deep and strong! *“Even so, come, Lord Jesus.”*  
***Maranatha!***

As Jonah and national Israel, so every soul must come to the same conclusion. To observe lying vanities is to forsake your own mercy. Salvation is of the Lord!

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Consider now the question of whether Jonah actually died in the fish’s belly and was then restored to life, or whether he was in fact preserved alive there. We are not specifically told in the text, and good men land on either side of this question. It certainly sounds like death (probably seemed so to Jonah) and resurrection to hear Jonah describe it. Such would seem to better serve Christ’s use of the event to illustrate His own death and resurrection. But I believe the prophet’s experience in the fish was a preservation of his life there, for

the following reasons;

- We are told in Jonah 1:17 that *Jonah* was in the fish, not his body. Compare the account of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16. After their respective deaths, Lazarus “*was carried by the angels into Abraham’s bosom*”, and the rich man was “*in hell*” (vs. 22-23), though of course their bodies were left where buried. *They* were not in the grave, their bodies were. Even so the person, Jonah, was swallowed alive, and Jonah was vomited up.
- Jonah *prayed* while in the fish. He certainly had to be alive to do that.
- We are not *told* it was a resurrection. Seems like we would have been if it were.
- But what of the point that for Jesus to use this as a type of His three days death and resurrection this must be a death and resurrection? Perhaps Jesus simply used the idea of 3 days *confinement*, rather than of death and resurrection. Listen carefully to His words in Matthew 12:40;

*“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”.*

Jesus did not say “as Jonas was *dead*” for that time, only that he “*was*” there for that time. Again, Jonah was where? *In the fish!* Not in the place of the dead. Even Christ’s words put Jonah in the fish, for he “*was*” not in sheol, but “*was . . . in the whale’s belly*”, just as Jesus in death was not in the tomb, but in the heart of the earth.

“So the people of Nineveh  
believed God,  
and proclaimed a fast,  
and put on sackcloth,  
from the greatest of them  
even to the least of them”

(Jonah 3:5)

## Chapter 3

### *The Restored, Re-commissioned Prophet*

#### *Jonah in the City*

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*3:1 And the word of the LORD came unto Jonah the second time, saying,*

*3:2 Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee.*

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I find it encouraging that Jonah's wilful disobedience did not disqualify him from the Lord's service altogether. God, in His mercy and patience, gives a man another chance. As Peter. As John Mark. Hey, there is a sense in which you can still be for the Lord what you have fled from. It is still not too late to turn back.

Now understand that this was more than just a command. It was a *test* as well, just as the first commission of chapter 1. This was a test of discipline's effect upon Jonah. A test of the worth or reality of the man's repentance. A test of the genuineness of his prayer and of the strength of his vows. And Jonah's quick obedience proved it real.

We find in 3:2 a repetition of 1:2, with the addition

of “*preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee.*” This bit was likely added for good reasons. The Lord knows the adversary. He knows Satan’s subtlety and desperation. If Satan cannot *prevent* the preaching of God’s message, he will attempt to *pervert* it. If he cannot *divert* it, he will seek to *dilute* it if he can. The evil one is ever committed to keeping the power of God’s undiluted message away from his domain by any and every means.

As well, the Lord knew the preacher. He knew there remained a lean in Jonah toward Satan’s purpose. Jonah did not want to see the hated people of Nineveh redeemed anymore than Satan did. Perhaps it is toward this concern the Lord now speaks. “Jonah, you do what I say, *and* you say what I say to say!” Both the *mission* and the *message* must be the Lord’s! Both the *way* and the *words* are divinely given, or the message will not be fitted to the spiritual condition of those who hear. Those high-handed religious leaders who freely dilute or soften God’s message, preaching a modern smoother cross, demonstrate that they have no true commission from God. Such are not servants of the Lord but servants of self, ultimately helpers more of *Satan’s* cause than the Saviour’s. They are as the sons of Korah (Num. 16), presuming upon themselves what the Lord has not given. Men fit to

*3:3 So Jonah arose, and went unto Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD. Now Nineveh was an exceeding great city of three days' journey.*

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be swallowed by the earth. God has given us His words of truth, His gospel message, to preach. It may seem a hard message. It may seem a message unappreciated by its hearers. But it is a message fitted by God for the work to which He has sent it. If it is *God* who gave it, then we can be neither quiet nor careless with it. We cannot be given to making our own adjustments. We must let fly in unadulterated form.

Vs. 3 – “*So Jonah arose, and went unto Nineveh*” – Jonah got up without hesitation and did just what the Lord said. He went to Nineveh, entered the city, and began preaching as he went. Upon entering Jerusalem for His final week of ministry, Jesus cleared the temple the second time of the money-changers. The Jewish leaders were immediately in His face, questioning by whose authority He had so acted. Jesus answered their question with a question, concerning the matter of John’s baptism, hitching His answer to their question upon their answer to His. In so doing Jesus indicated He possessed an authority higher than theirs. He did not *have* to answer their questions. Jesus then told

*3:4 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.*

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that parable (Matt. 21:28-29) of the father who sent his two sons into the vineyard to work. One said, “I will not”, but later repented and went. The other said, “I go, sir”, but never did. The parable describes those with surface religion in contrast to those truly faithful. The Jewish people and leaders were those professing to obey, wearing a skin-deep religion, but who in reality were not obedient to God at all. Like many believers, they said, “We go, Lord”. They display the outward allegiance of lip-love, but with the faulty follow-through of heart-hate. Jonah now shows himself as the first son, saying, “I will not”, followed by repentance and return to the work.

*“And Jonah began to enter into the city a day's journey, and he cried”* – To Jonah's credit the first day he entered Nineveh he was preaching. He did not rest first. He did not begin with a spot of sightseeing. He conducted no survey or demographic study seeking the most likely neighbourhood in which to start. He just walked in and got started. After all there was no time to lose, for they had only the briefest window period.

Now before we move on, please allow me to highlight again the method God assigned to Jonah, the method He sees fit to bless. *Preaching!* Nothing else! *Street-preaching* here. Simply taking God's message to the people. Oral persuasion is the method of God, the method blessed here.

*“Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown”* – Wow! A bit of a *hard* word, hey? Yet though hard, it was a true message, for God had said it. Squeamishness must not be allowed to delay the pressing of it on the people. Such a hard message, yet the temptation to adjust it a bit softer must be resisted. Such a brief period of opportunity required full potency. There was simply no time for diluted, soft-shelled, charming sweetness. There was no time for shielded, insinuating, clever methods. No time for neighbourhood religious surveys slipping in leading enquiries, or EE type diagnostic questions. It was purely the full-blown urgency of a man with knowledge of an incoming tsunami and warning every soul on the beach, “Yet one hour and a 20 meter tidal wave will rise out of the sea and consume all on the beach”. It was the urgency of an instructor, over the radio in the earphones of a learner parachutist who is paralysed with fear as he plummets to his death, ***“Pull the rip-cord!”*** Nothing fancy. No effort to win their

approval. No ice-breakers or crowd-pleasing ploys. No overtures or eloquence. Though one might expect an air of defiance in great Nineveh, that a foreigner would dare come and so boldly confront them, yet neither God nor Jonah concerned themselves with that. Indeed there is real bravery here! Defying every potential obstacle or threat, Jonah stood humanly alone in the streets of that infamously bloodthirsty city and preached a sermon fit to flatter nobody! Look well at what happens here my friend. We could use more men of this stripe. And should our approach to the modern world with the gospel message be any different from Jonah's at Nineveh? Same urgency, right? Any lighter weight approach would compromise the urgency, as a flippant announcement of an incoming tsunami would convince few. If the message is still urgent, then the method must still be urgent. Here lies the problem with the trite approaches of Christian skits, drama, puppets, etc. in communicating God's message of warning and grace.

Now look again at this ominous message. "*Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown.*" Did you notice there was no promise of mercy for repentance even suggested there? It was an utterly negative message, with severest threat! The Hebrew word behind "*overthrown*" is the same used of Sodom and

Gomorrah (Gen. 19:25), a historical event perhaps still lingering in the history books of neighbouring societies such as this. Utter destruction was the obvious meaning. But though no positive promise was preached in Nineveh a positive promise was implied in the message, yes? If the Lord wished the city destroyed then why the forewarning? Why not just do it, as at Sodom? Why trouble a prophet to come 900 kms bearing God's threat? And why 40 days? Why any grace period at all? It was easy to see how the Lord's approach implied some possibility of mercy, which implied the need of their right response. As blind Bartimaeus in Jericho (Mk. 10:46ff), these people were not slow to grasp the significance of passing opportunity. And you?

Now marvel with me for a moment in the glaring fact that though this message of Jonah's was utterly negative and the picture of simplicity to understand (only eight words in English, five in Hebrew), yet amazingly this represents *the most effective sermon ever preached* upon earth for sheer, immediate response or results. Dr. Charles Feinberg wrote in this regard, "Nowhere do we read in the Bible or outside of it that one message from a servant of God was used of God to so great an extent. For the whole city of Nineveh believed God! Nothing remotely approximating this has ever taken place in the

history of revivals.” *Some one million people put right with God!!*

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## **Side Note**

Please do not miss it. As with all Bible prophecy, this announcement was to be understood literally or normally. Jonah preached of a literal, actual judgment, and his message was correctly read just that way. Again, the Bible shows us how to read the Bible, indeed how to read all prophecies and warnings spoken by the Lord and recorded in His eternal Word, which cannot be broken.

.....

Look well at the method and message of this most effective ministry ever recorded. Utterly negative in message. Completely straight-forward in method. Involving no subtleties, it was all simplicity in content, without the slightest bit of intrigue, cleverness, charisma, eloquence, or any such window-dressing. Not the least bit preacher-dependent for its success. It came without any argument, evidence, reasoning, or proving of anything. Just the simple, solemn statement of the facts, stated and left to accomplish its purpose. It was a message totally prophetic in nature. It was

without any evident foundational work done, unlike the results at Pentecost where the phenomenal life, words, and works of Jesus Christ preceded. Jonah's approach in Nineveh did not evidence even the slightest supernatural flavour (apart from the miraculous effect upon the people). No miracles, healings, or other manifestations of the Spirit. Thus miracles cannot be essential for effective ministry results. This was completely without cottage prayer meetings, praying in these results, pleading with God for fruit, calling down God's power upon this wicked city. In fact *not even the preacher was praying for these results!* Quite the last thing Jonah wanted in fact. The whole scene was utterly without the usual revival lore we often hear of. We can only conclude that all such "essentials" are in fact non-essentials for such ministry results as these. The only *essential* is what we observe right here, a verbal message of warning boldly preached in obedience to God. Obviously God was in this. It was His time for Nineveh. It was His work. But His work through His Word delivered in His way.

From a human perspective, how should we then labour while we wait for God to work? What should be our approach to the unsaved? The obvious principles of ministry to the unsaved world are here for our gleaning. The literal, honest,

straightforward preaching of prophetic promise and warning of divine judgment must be the supreme emphasis. Thus all of the smiling happy boys, with their so terribly positive and popular preaching styles, conveniently skipping the more negative elements of certain, terrible divine judgment, are off track I'm afraid. The positive, happy promise of mercy, forgiveness, and cleansing upon repentance and faith is a less important mention. As at Nineveh, the positive is easily understood from the negative announced. Don't you dare come away from the presence of the unsaved, having "shared the gospel", without giving clear, urgent warning of hell. Without this you gave no message fit to hit where it counts. Don't worry, the tender of heart will thank God for you. Tend to pitch the subtleties of presentation and method and over-illustrating, so vitally important to modern "effective" preaching technique. Ever tend toward a simple, straightforward, blunt, urgent approach. Match the method with the message – *urgent*. Wide-eyed and wet-eyed. And understand that miracles are *unnecessary* for fruitful ministry or abundant results. No ministry ever displayed the miraculous more than Jesus Christ's. Yet at His ascension there was a relatively tiny group of only 120 disciples in the upper room, about 0.01% of Jonah's results.

Whether street-mates, work-mates, school-mates, cell-mates, or whoever, we must ever be plying our opportunities, ever laying it out clearly that “You are a sinner, and God will judge you”. Do not tend to *end* there if you have time. Tend to *begin* there. Hey, it is Satan’s greatest terror! A company of Christians actually storming the world in this way, with the spearhead of the message God’s prophetic promise of sure judgment, followed by the gospel of peace.

Look now to Satan’s counter-move. What would be the soul-immunization programme he would seek to implement worldwide to counter this kind of message? Understand why he, through the media, so often casts the dooms-day preacher as the wild-eyed, unkempt, weirdo type, preaching hellfire and brimstone out in the public square. A woebegone figure obviously caught up in a strange world of fanatic fantasy, quite disconnected from reality. A basic dysfunctional type, hey? A Townhill case. They just have not come to get him yet. Do you see how Satan pre-empted God’s message, by making such a negative carrier of doom and gloom the world’s *joke*? It is an old ploy. Can you picture how Noah must have been presented by the media to his own evil generation, through satirical caricatures in the news-tablets of his day?

As well, the evil one pre-empts by permeating modern philosophy and conventional “wisdom” with the terribly fashionable, all-important *positive outlook*. “Agh no man, to be negative is harmful, soul-destroying, discouraging. *Unhealthy* souls are negative. Control freaks threaten people with doom and gloom. Doomsayers are really injurious types to the max, and so anti-society. The poor mal-adjusted things are just so fraught with detrimental complexes. Healthy well-adjusted souls, they are always *positive*.” Sound familiar? The result of it of course is that we swim against a driving current when bringing a strongly negative message to the unsaved, as Jonah’s to Nineveh. “Judgment is coming!” just does not fit! You find it difficult to proclaim too, do you not? Because you are afraid of the bad light you would be cast into if such words fell from your lips. So by all means we keep our witness *positive* and *upbeat!* Picture that approach on the beach with incoming tsunami. “Oh I must say you certainly have a lovely spot here on the beach, and never a finer day. Listen Sport, could I dare suggest something for your consideration? Now please do not think me intrusive or weird or anything like that, gracious no, but I have it on good authority that this lovely spot is likely to be about 20 metres underwater within an hour’s time. Nasty tsunami on the way they say. But do not let me ruin

your day. Cheers mate.” Could we expect anything else but that the true message, the truly effective one, would be the hardest to bring to Satan’s world? The one folks most desperately need to hear. The one most dangerous to Satan’s cause. If you get nothing else out of Jonah chapter 3, please do not miss (and do not ever forget) this point. The most effective sermon ever preached to the unsaved world was a prophetic message of God’s judgment, brought in a blunt, straightforward fashion, with no good news, and no miracles. And it was brought through the age-old method of the foolishness of simply proclaiming it.

Compare with this the blistering approach of the gospels. John the Baptist warned of Jesus, that He would baptize with the Holy Spirit *and fire*. He would come both to baptize the saved with the Spirit and to consume the chaff of the unsaved with unquenchable fire (Matt. 3:12). Jesus forewarned, “*Except ye repent ye shall all likewise perish*” (Lk. 13:3-5). In fact He underscored with a twice mention in the same context. Again in Luke 13 Jesus told of those to whom one day He would say, “*Depart from Me...there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth*” (vs. 27-28). Two of Christ’s parables (wheat & tares and dragnet) warned of the furnace of fire where there shall be wailing and

gnashing of teeth. Two out of seven of His Matthew 13 parables end this way. Jesus told vividly of an unsaved man who died and in hell was tormented in the flames (Lk. 16). And there He made it clear that there was warning enough for the world in Moses and the prophets. He spoke in Mark 9 of offending hands, feet, and eyes, better removed than for the soul to suffer hell fire, where the worm never dies and the fire is never quenched (5 times repeated for *supreme emphasis*). At the centurion's demonstration of faith Jesus warned of Jews who would be cast to outer darkness, again where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matt. 8:12). He spoke of that improperly attired guest at the wedding, bound and cast into outer darkness (Matt. 22:11-13). This referring to those souls meeting death without the white robe of righteousness which only God can give to a man. Again the warning there of weeping and gnashing of teeth. Jesus warned of the coming judgment of sheep and goats (Matt. 25:31) where He will say to the goats (unsaved), "*Depart from Me ye cursed into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels*". Compare as well in the N.T. epistles, portions such as II Thessalonians 1:8-9; II Peter 3:7; Hebrews 10:26-31; 12:29. Indeed without the salvation from sin, which only Jesus can give, *you* will surely perish!

*3:5 So the people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them.”*

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So Jonah has gone to Nineveh and has entered the city preaching God’s warning. The people of Nineveh have most certainly done nothing to deserve this warning and the possibility of mercy implied in it. This warning is all of God’s grace. There is nothing subtle about God’s prophet. He did not hide the terror of the message or the greatness of their sin in complex sentences. He laid it all open before them in but a few, simple, terrifying words. He was not afraid of angry mobs or sneering, refined intellectuals. He made no attempt at eloquence. He was stern and defiant of the greatness and power of vast, intimidating Nineveh. Yet his heart was still not really in it. He was not there because he wanted to be. He was very likely not praying for a right response in the people.

*“So the people of Nineveh believed God”* – Again, so casual! So matter-of-fact! *“So the people of Nineveh believed God”*. Just like that! Like it happens all the time! Yet remember Isaiah’s anguished cry, *“Lord, who hath believed our report?”* And godly Noah took only his family with, after 120 years of ministry.

This incredible response in Nineveh was so spontaneous, so from the heart, that nobody waited for guidance from their king. The response appears to be immediate, all putting on outward symbols of inward repentance and humility. They proclaimed a fast. They put on sackcloth (coarse uncomfortable cloth), and this including folks from every social stratum; the rich and famous, the high, mighty, and honoured, right down to the poorest slave or beggar. *“From the greatest of them even to the least”*. ***I sigh!!*** As I sigh when reading of God’s working in other great revivals of the past. And I wonder why then and not now? Why there and not here? Difference in era or audience? Likely! But if through a difference in the preacher then oh Lord change me! Could it be a case of our tending to preach only to moral, refined sinners in churches? Maybe if we want to preach to those who *know* they are sinners, such as in this city of Nineveh, we must more effectively take it out to them. But as well *it is God’s work!* It is a matter of Him opening hearts, as with Lydia in Acts 16:14, *“Whose heart the Lord opened”*. Though men are clearly responsible to believe, there is no denying God’s part in a heart made ready to hear. It seems likely the Lord would have used the pressure of circumstances to prepare these Ninevites over time. Walvoord & Zuck, comparing historical records, suggest in their *“Bible Knowledge*

*Commentary*” that plagues had broken out in Nineveh, both 6 years prior to Jonah’s arrival and in the same year of his preaching tour. Also it appears there was a total eclipse of the sun 4 years before his arrival. Plagues and eclipses and such were considered omens of divine anger by the superstitious people of that day. A plague, then 2 years later a total eclipse, then 4 yrs later another plague. And then in walks Jonah, looking like fish vomit and warning of their ripeness for the wrath of God. Timing that could only have been organized by the Lord to soften hearts and prepare the way for His preacher, raising anticipation of looming calamity and then bringing announcement of the same through His preacher.

Some just deny such a response in Nineveh and the Bible’s account of it, and point out that no record has been found in Assyrian history of this citywide repentance. My, my, what a surprise! Historical records often exclude or shade events considered unimportant or embarrassing by the historian (even modern records). Have they found detailed mention in Egyptian historical records of their army massacred in the Red Sea? Or Assyrian records of their 185,000-strong army dead on King Hezekiah’s doorstep? Or accurate records in Ethiopian annals of their one time million-strong army crushed by

*3:6 For word came unto the king of Nineveh, and he  
arose from his throne, and he laid his robe from him,  
and covered him with sackcloth, and sat in ashes.*

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Judah under King Asa? I wonder how fairly or honestly modern Arab history books record the 6-day war with Israel in 1967, with the shocking humiliation of their defeat far worse than their land loss. Be not faithless but believing. The Word of God is just that, the words of God, relating to man the true events of history.

*“For word came unto the king of Nineveh”* – Highlighting the last phrase of vs. 5, the king himself followed suit. He was strangely not annoyed to be follower rather than initiator of a popular movement, bespeaking the genuineness of his humility in light of the message of doom. The king even added the aspect of sitting in ashes, symbolizing deepest humiliation and sorrow. And understand that as this king bowed in humility before the Lord, he arose. At that moment he became truly kingly, more king-like than ever. He became human in fact, having been more brutish in his pride. Compare King Nebuchadnezzar’s fall to a beast-like existence in his pride and then return to humanity in humility (Dan. 4). Humility makes a man human.

3:7 *And he caused it to be proclaimed and published through Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying, Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste any thing: let them not feed, nor drink water:*

3:8 *But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily unto God: yea, let them turn every one from his evil way, and from the violence that is in their hands.*

3:9 *Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from His fierce anger, that we perish not?*

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*“And he caused it to be proclaimed and published through Nineveh”* – The king confirmed and gave direction to the citywide repentance, making it official and mandatory.

*“And cry mightily unto God”* – As the unsaved sailors, these now recognized sincere prayer as the only way to stop God’s hand of judgment. Every unsaved soul must recognize the same. All must call upon the name of the Lord to be saved, and whosoever shall so call in humility will indeed be saved (Rom. 10:13). Do not miss how they prayed with great sorrow for their sin and guilt. The King in fact called their ways *“evil”*. They prayed with great earnestness, *“cry mightily”*. And they prayed to the *true God*. Strange that. They did not even run first to their false gods for deliverance from God’s hand, as the sailors first tried. And they

prayed with genuine reform, “cry” and “turn” the key words in vs. 8. The “cry” without the “turn”, prayer without change, is to mock God. Such part-way response would reveal insincerity and a continued love of evil.

*“If I regard [look with favour, as the eye lingers on objects of pleasure] iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me”* (Ps. 66:18).

Sin regarded, relished, entertained disqualifies prayer.

*“If My people...shall pray...**and** turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear”* (II Chron. 7:14).

*“He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be an abomination”* (Prov. 28:9).

*“He that covereth [conceals, denies] his sins shall not prosper; but whoso confesseth **and** forsaketh [leave off, cease] them shall have mercy”* (Prov. 28:13).

Here was that ex-blind man’s point in John 9:31, when he said, “God heareth not sinners”, that if Jesus were indeed a sinner, how could He expect anything from God?

*“The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much”* (James 5:16).

*3:10 And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented [turned] of the evil, that He had said that He would do unto them; and He did it not.*

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Do not bother with your devotional acts and mile-long prayers if there is not in you a sincere *will* and *effort* to be clean. Here is genuine repentance in these Ninevites. There is in them sorrow for sin and the hatred of it, not just for having gotten caught, not just because of impending judgment, but for being an offence to God, for their “*evil*” and guilt. There is in them an earnestness, with a will and effort toward change. This God requires of those who seek His mercy.

“*And God repented of the evil*” – Nineveh repented or changed their direction, so God did the same. Hey have you noticed the pattern?

- Chapter 1 – The sailors were confronted with the true God. They sincerely called upon Him, and He granted them the deliverance of a calm sea.
- Chapter 2 – Jonah was brought to genuine repentance. He sincerely called upon the LORD, and was granted the deliverance of solid ground.

- Chapter 3 – Nineveh genuinely repented. They sincerely called upon the LORD, and He granted them the deliverance of judgment withheld.

Then in chapter 4 Jonah will again be brought to repentance. Moral of the story?

*“Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out”* (Jn. 6:37).

*“Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved”* (Rom. 10:13).

With genuine, sincere, repentant prayer to God comes assured deliverance. It is a theme running throughout this little book.

*“And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way”* – What “works” did He so approve of that He would so turn from His planned judgment? We are not told that He remembered their fasting, or their sackcloth and ashes, or their prayers, but *“that they turned (repented) from their evil way”*. It was not the externals He noted so much as the inward repentance and revulsion, leading naturally on to the outward forsaking of evil. As that wayward prodigal son’s inward *turn* brought his outward *return* (Lk.15:17-20). It is in this sense that the final judgment of the lost shall be *“according to their*

*works*” (Rev. 20:12-13). Condemned they shall be for their evil will, ever refusing to turn in repentance *“from their evil way”*. By their deeds they show their love of darkness and real hatred of *“the light”* (Jn. 3:19-20). It is this misplaced, backward love/hate, shown in their works, that condemns them.

As well, this Ninevite repentance was born of faith, for they *“believed God”* (vs. 5). God’s mercy is never based on merits. His grace is never earned by human activity. But there is no denying that God quickly responds to such faith-repentance.

Not only was there a turn in God from His planned judgment, but heaven rang with joy as well.

*“Joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth . . . There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth”* (Lk. 15:7, 10).

Now multiply that joy *“over one sinner”* by about a million, for the whole blessed city repented!! *What absolutely overflowing heavenly rapture!*

Let’s consider now this statement that *“God repented of the evil, that He said He would do...”*. Men with a sight more education than this preacher do a good bit of chattering over a difficult verse and

concept like this. One noteworthy scholar commented that “when the Scriptures speak of God repenting, it is the language of appearance: the language of accommodation, from the viewpoint of man”. Another stated, “of course, it is after the manner of men that the Spirit speaks, when He attributes to God at any time repentance, or a change of mind at all”. With all due respect for learned men and their thoughts, I have never been happy with this sort of explanation. Did the Lord repent, turn, relent or did He not? Such explanations seem to rob the text of its essential meaning. As if to say the Lord did not really turn or change His mind properly, just that He implied He did for the sake of appearances, for our benefit. It seems to me that such explanations rob God of feeling, of emotion. Like He never really relents or even could. Why not? I suspect such comment an effort to wriggle out of the difficulty of explaining the Almighty. God’s threatenings are conditional, that is all. His responses are genuinely dependent upon man’s responses. Somehow, in the wonder of He who is God, He ever knows in advance what will come and what He will do, yet in the event His options are real options nonetheless (Jer. 18:7-8).

But how can a sovereign God, who sees the beginning from the end, condition His actions upon

the responses of men or change His mind? Angazi! Do not know and not sure I need to. *I* do not, *we* do not, any more than *any man* knows. But trying to explain it away only compounds the problem. Charles Spurgeon once said, and I believe with a measure of wisdom, “Brethren, be willing to see both sides of the shield of truth. Rise above the babyhood which cannot believe two doctrines until it sees the connecting link. Have you not two eyes, man? Must you needs put one of them out in order to see clearly?” God *meant it* when He said He would destroy Nineveh, and He most certainly would have. It came as a conditional threat, or there would have been no warning at all. But if He knew ahead of time that they would comply, why threaten destruction? Read it simply, on the surface of it. The threat was the means to bring the crises. The crises brought human repentance. The human repentance turned God’s hand. Indeed it was a real threat and a real change of mind, both human and divine, yet a God who is sovereign and omniscient.

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## **Ponder Points**

Consider again the mixed results through the ages. Noah came away with only his family, after 120 years of preaching. Jesus won 120 in 3 years of earthly ministry. Jonah reaped a million in 3 days!

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What an astounding influence one life can have for good, for God! Yes the marvel of this ministry was God's work. But it was God working *through the man*, Jonah.

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There was a far-reaching lesson here for the nation of Israel. Behold how quick the Lord to show compassion to a wicked but believing, repentant Gentile people, even people as bad as Assyrian Nineveh. When the Lord finally came down on Israel in judgment she must know that it was not because of His unwillingness to forgive, but for her hard-heartedness. And if and when He finally comes down on you, it will not be due to His unwillingness to forgive, for He pardoned even wicked Nineveh upon their sincere faith-repentance.

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How much worse the judgment for those with such greater advantages and light?

Nineveh had

We have

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An *unwilling*  
Prophet

The *willing*,  
sacrificing Son of  
God

*One prophet*

*Hundreds of  
preachers*

*One sermon*

*Thousands!*

*No Bible*

*Stacks!*

*Bad news only*

*Good news also*

*3 days ministry*

*Years*

*40-day window*

*Lifetime (?)*

What better are you, oh unrepentant one, for all of your greater advantage? Are you not in fact worse off, being so thoroughly hardened for your constant resisting of God's appeals?

*“Verily the men of Nineveh shall rise up in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it; for they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and behold a greater than Jonah is here” (Lk. 11:32).*

“Then said the LORD,  
Doest thou well to be angry?”

(Jonah 4:4)

# Chapter 4

## *The Relapsed, Resistant Prophet*

### *Jonah on the Hillside*

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*4:1 But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was very angry.*

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Jonah was obviously informed of God's turning (3:10), for he was now livid with the news of it. Surely God had communicated that good news to His prophet to be passed on to the people of Nineveh. Yet in view of Jonah's sullen spirit here it would seem unlikely that good news of their release was ever carried to the people. It appears they were forced to anxiously sweat out those fearful 40 days unaware of their happy deliverance. For while heaven was ringing with joy and hallelujahs over the faith, repentance, and rescue of Nineveh, Jonah was red in the face with rage for the very same reason! Oh how the prophet was poles apart from the purpose of his God...*again!* This fact framed in the first words of this chapter, "*But...Jonah*". Alas, Jonah was *butting* again! When God was full of *compassion*, Jonah was full of *rage*. With God's turn *from* anger, Jonah turned *to* anger, and with

greatest emphasis, “*displeased... exceedingly...very angry*”. Jonah was not just a little perturbed!

The record seems to have come to its climax with the revival of Nineveh, and we could easily expect the story to end right there. Yet in the Lord’s wise and loving concern there is more – more for Jonah, and more for us to learn through this petulant prophet. Jonah would certainly have been left in a better light if the curtain had dropped while still a beaming success story. As if the account went just a bit too long for the good of this man’s reputation. ’Tis often the case with a man of God. The final chapter of his life can be the most difficult and revealing. I remember reading of a preacher greatly used of God in the prime of his life. But in his later years, struggling still with his carnal nature he cried to the Lord to keep him from becoming a dirty old man! I know of a man who after years of fruitful ministry for the Lord fell to illicit relations with women, and another who fell to homosexuality. It is war to the very end my friend! Until our faith at last breaks through to sight in the Lord’s presence. How often it is the final chapter that sullies the record, seeming to undo all the good that had gone before.

While Gentiles had *inwardly* turned to God through

4:2 *And he prayed unto the LORD, and said, I pray Thee, O LORD, was not this my saying, when I was yet in my country? Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish: for I knew that Thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest Thee of the evil.*

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His message preached, the prophet's turning we now discover to be only an *outward* thing. It is as if Jonah has turned right around again, swinging back through the humble devotion of chapter 2 to the quarrelling resistance of chapter 1. *Not running*, mind you! Clever enough he was to not go that route again. But *not right!* How fickle and changeable the human heart! As Abraham and Jacob, swinging from times of such victory and valour to times of such vulnerability. How like us, this fallible man. And how good the Lord and full of integrity to give the whole, candid story.

Do not miss as well how relentless Satan's wicked temptations and foul influences. Oh we cannot blame our responses on him, yet we cannot lose sight of him nor be ignorant of his subtle devises. Jonah was a *target of Satan* because he was a *tool of salvation*, a most effective warrior in a raging spiritual battle. The evil one had absorbed a terrible blow and loss to his domain, wanting desperately now to cut off occasion for further loss. Thus he

was sure to be involved here behind the scenes, prodding the spirit of this chaffing channel.

*“For I knew that Thou art a gracious God”* – Ah Jonah! You would deny God’s goodness to the Ninevites, those dogs of the Gentiles. How like Israel he was, perhaps symbolizing her in this way. He was so full of self-interest rather than mercy. How much happier he would have been to see Nineveh destroyed than shown the least grace. How much more zealous for their destruction he was than for their sparing. He was like the second son, brother to the prodigal (Lk. 15:25-32), happy for his father to despise his wayward brother, enraged when his father strangely loved him still. In his *self-interest* he was too jealous to share in his *Father’s* interest. As Israel; happy for God’s attention and benefits, wanting Him all to themselves, making Him in their own thinking to be altogether as small-hearted as themselves, inwardly fashioning Him as they wished to perceive Him. And in this sense they had in fact fabricated a different god than the true, enraged to find God’s interests broader than their own pinched perspective and nation, a God not willing that *any* should perish, Jew or Gentile. And thus they in effect reject the true God when they find Him unlike the God of their own making.

Oh there is warning here for us, lest we develop that same narrow spirit! A “*we are the people!*” sort of attitude, believing that “*we alone hold God’s interest*”, with eyes as narrowed as our hearts. And we begin to look down upon those of other persuasions, or the unsaved, or those especially vile or repulsive to us, the cruel or murderous, the child-molester, the homosexual, those who make us inwardly cringe. When in fact we should rather be looking *up* or *across* to others, eyes wide with earnest and wet with yearning, hearts openly longing for their best, loving rather than despising. No sin, no false doctrine, no aggression must ever disqualify a soul from his opportunity. I am not talking about toleration of evil or bad doctrine, but toleration of *people*, as we seek to win them to the truth. The world is God’s interest, every man.

*“Warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus”* (Col. 1:28).

*“I knew that Thou art a gracious God”,* Jonah grumbled, *“and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest Thee of the evil”*. What do you hear in Jonah’s words? Is this not essentially *rebuke* levelled at the Lord of Glory, reproved for His kindness?! Can you imagine? The audacity!! Creature correcting Creator! “I knew it! I knew this

would happen! I knew You were kind and merciful. I was afraid of this, that You would back off on Your anger! Oh now look what You have done! They are not even going to perish! Oh this is too frustrating!” Jonah seeks to correct the character of God! He most decidedly suggested adjustments were needed in the aim of His divine grace!

I find myself thinking of questions I would throw at Jonah (and at the nature within me that is too much like his). Did this man really think he could govern God’s world better than God? Is God so foolish, as this prophet implies? Is it ever clever to be sore at the Lord for exercising His pardoning grace? Where would *Jonah* be without God’s grace and pardon? Would he deny the Ninevites what he himself was so happy for, deliverance from judgment? Would this object of God’s compassion show no compassion? Would he see mercy extend no farther than himself, or his own race or kind? Oh my! Such contrasts! The sailors rowed hard for Jonah, even after they found him to be the scoundrel causing their great damage and danger. The Ninevites have been no skin off Jonah’s nose, yet he cannot permit God’s goodness to them! It is the image of that heartless servant of Christ’s parable in Matthew 18:23ff. That one forgiven so much yet unwilling to forgive but a little. As if God did not know the

thoughts of his heart, Jonah now shamelessly lays bare the dark motivation for his original flight. It seems he justifies his running now, suggesting he was right to do it, quarrelling with God like Naomi, making his new situation to excuse his old sins. We see no recognition in him of the wrong of his anger. No desire or request for help to overcome it. He seems to feel he has the right to his ranting, as if it were righteous rage. Is there such a thing as righteous indignation *against God?* Of course not! There was nothing right about this at all, as the Lord's question now implies.

You see, the outward rebellious actions (running) have been dealt with in this man. Jonah would not likely do that again. But the inward rebellious attitude has yet to be fully put right. That is a whole further thing, the very source and reason for the outward response at the first in fact. Thus the need for this last chapter. We have a lesson here on the depths to which true sanctification must reach. If we would be truly and fully right we must acquire the heart of God. This is that blessed place to which God is pressing Jonah, and this is His goal for us. When we think we have at last come to submission before the Lord He takes us the step further, unfolding more of what really motivates us. He further unveils our wicked hearts, wanting true

*4:3 Therefore now, O LORD, take, I beseech Thee, my life from me; for it is better for me to die than to live.*

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holiness there. He further unveils His great heart, that we might more fully see the stark contrast in ourselves (as He did with Isaiah in chapter 6 of his book). The Lord bumps with the hard knock of circumstance to further display the rot spots in us, that we might seek His healing there too. Complete transformation, both outward and inward, is His aim.

*“Changed into the same image (of the Lord) from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord” (II Cor. 3:18).*

*“Now unto Him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy” (Jude 24).*

Our right response to every such painful personal rot revelation must ever be confession, repentance, and “Yes Lord, Yes Lord, Yes Lord”.

*“Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting” (Ps. 139:23-24).*

“For it is better for me to die than to live” – “Better for me to die than to” love perhaps. Rather than a ready willingness to be led further into God’s ways, rather than a will for change, rather than be reconciled to God, rather than learn to love, Jonah was so peeved that he wanted to just die! This is nothing but stomping and storming pride, demanding, **“I WANT MY WAY!”** He neither wants to do what the Lord wants, nor does he dare to *not* do it, so he would prefer to just die, feeling trapped in God’s will. Again, it is an escape effort we have seen before in Jonah (1:12; 4:8). He hits a difficult patch and he wants out. Seems to me he was praying to *live* in chapter 2.

What a mercy that God does not answer all of our foolish prayers, hey? When Jonah prayed for his help in the fish, God answered. When he prayed for his hurt in the clash, God ignored. The Lord is good! He cares for us and others, though we do not. And how gracious the Lord’s questions here. Though Jonah was so selfish and intolerant, how very different is the Lord!

“Doest thou well to be angry?” – “Is your anger good

and right and fair, Jonah? Do you have reasonable grounds for this response?” So penetrating, yet so tender and patient. Such tolerance for the man’s intolerance, adding all the more force to the Lord’s approach. The Master of wind and sea had striven before to correct this troubled and troublesome prophet, through storm and fish confinement. Violent measures! Extreme measures! But now through quiet measures He seeks further correction, through reasoning to conviction. What gentle, gracious condescension! The word “condescension” literally means to “come down with”, and this is what the Lord did here. He came down to reason with His ill-tempered child. Again, this was not the first time Jonah had resisted God’s will. How little the prophet was deserving of the Lord’s further endurance. Even so the Lord’s patient pleadings with the relentlessly wayward nation of Israel in Isaiah 1:18 (“*Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord*”), after describing in grossly vivid detail the awful offensiveness of their sin. We should not be surprised if the Lord was cross with Jonah here. He responded so with Moses under seemingly lesser motivation (Ex. 3-4). There is a place for honest enquiry before the Lord. There is a place for humble uncertainty. But when it shades to stubborn resistance one is risking the Lord’s righteous wrath. This is the risk Jonah ran

here to so irritably question God. This man had wished for the destruction of Nineveh. He sought to justify his past rebellion. He had subtly reproached the character of God. And now for the second time he stood opposed to the heart and purposes of the Lord. Yet behold the grace of God that He would calmly reason with Jonah here, when it seems from our perspective the man needed a jolly good thump! Even so the Lord patiently sought to reason with Cain when he made himself the first murderer (Gen. 4). No stinging rebuke as we might expect. Just penetrating, exposing questions. “Do you do well to be angry?” Attempting to bring Jonah to see his hot displeasure in a true light. And for answer, Jonah turned his back and walked away, sullenly stomping out of the city.

Now let’s consider for a moment the results of Jonah’s bitter, brooding response. Did his temper turn the circumstances at all? Nope! Did a poochy lip move either the heart or hand of God even a bit? Afraid not! Jonah was allowed no control through such a manipulative approach. A good lesson for wise parenting as well. What *did* Jonah’s pouting attitude accomplish (for it did accomplish something)? Well, it put him into an agony of unrest. It accomplished that. His bitter heart chased away all peace and joy, with the Lord’s close

presence. Jonah was calmer on the raging sea with sailors poised to throw him overboard. He seemed more at ease even in the fish, in constant, confessing communion with the Lord. It seems it is better, as far as happiness is concerned, to be in the worst of danger *with God*, than to be *against Him* and miserable on a peaceful hillside. So his surly spirit did achieve that, it made him *perfectly miserable!*

Secondly, Jonah's icy response did something else perfectly. It made him look perfectly silly and childish. Jonah never appeared so small of heart and character as he does in this incident. He had arisen in our estimation from the depths of the sea, from deepest humiliation. He had picked himself up off that beach and walked right into our admiration. We have seen a courageous man of God preaching a bold message on the streets of a notoriously cruel and wicked city. But now, like King Ahab lying on his bed with face to the wall, this pouting prophet has accomplished another character reduction before us. Leaders is not pouters, and pouters is not leaders!

Thirdly, Jonah's attitude most surely accomplished God's displeasure. Though the Lord's enduring grace is beaming here, there is a paddle in His back

*4:5 So Jonah went out of the city, and sat on the east side of the city, and there made him a booth, and sat under it in the shadow, till he might see what would become of the city*

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pocket. God is graciously reasoning with the man, but His argument is aimed at demonstrating Jonah's foolishness.

The moral of the story is that the way to peace and happiness in life and before God, and the way to integrity of character before man is the same. It is the way of the calm, trusting submission of a Ruth, rather than the carping, anxious inward resistance of a Naomi or Jonah. Jonah is as unhappy here as he is unattractive. And it just did not do him any good to fight the Lord anyway! Nothing moves unless He moves it! And you are far more likely to move *Him* when walking *with* Him than when standing opposed. I am afraid the verse does not say, "Fight thyself also against the Lord, and He shall give thee the desires of thine heart". It is not what is written, and it is not what works.

*"Delight thyself also in the LORD; and He shall give thee the desires of thine heart" (Psalm 37:4).*

*"So Jonah went out of the city, and sat on the east*

*side of the city*” – Now what was Jonah doing on that hillside? His work was finished. He had accomplished God’s commission. It would appear he was quite free to go. Why did he not collect his camel and head for home? And look, now he has built himself a crude little shelter there. And there he sits hour after hour watching the city. Why? Well, we are told why he waited and watched.

“*Till he might see what would become of the city*” – But wait a minute! God had already told him what was to become of the city. Ah but you see Jonah had not yet resigned himself to that. He refused to accept *that!* He was still hoping for fireworks at the end of his 40-day vigil. This object of divine compassion was in a state of denial. He simply would not accept God’s refusal to carry out His justice on a people who so deserved it! Jonah, like so many among the people of earth, did not weigh repentance and belief as heavily as God does. “Hey, God has turned once, perhaps He will turn again. Let’s hope His judgment *will* finally fall after all.” Did Jonah, with Satan, *wish* for their fall? Would he stand as Satan with Job accusing these people before the Lord? Would Jonah perhaps suggest that they only turned to God for the benefit of His rescue? Would he, like Satan, think (*hope!*) their adherence to God only a surface thing? Does he

wish for the Lord to turn and forsake them as soon as the surface nature of their turning is exposed? It seems the likely reason for Jonah's actions. His burning gaze from the hillside, the only fire to fall upon the city, was a bit like watching a building implosion from a nice safe vantage point. But little did Jonah know that rather than preparing to rain judgment down on Nineveh the Lord had settled the issue with the city and was actually moving in on that lonely prophet sitting there under his little booth.

Do you see Jonah there, all unresigned to the will of God on the inside, all out of harmony with the Lord, with the good of man, and *with himself!!* Nothing but an angry spirit for company. No prayer do we hear from him up there. No communion with God in evidence. No dealing with his own heart or anger. No acknowledgement of wrong. And so careful about his booth he is, but not careful about his soul, about his God, about his walk. Like so many a man of earth, he was mindful to make provision for his own comforts, but unmindful of the purposes of his Creator. Such a sad picture, Jonah sitting there. He was miserable, far from his God, far from his friends, no power with God, few comforts, unpitied except by himself, a disappointing past, disappointing prospects for the future, just an

4:6 *And the LORD God prepared a gourd, and made it to come up over Jonah, that it might be a shadow over his head, to deliver him from his grief. So Jonah was exceeding glad of the gourd.*

4:7 *But God prepared a worm when the morning rose the next day, and it smote the gourd that it withered.*

4:8 *And it came to pass, when the sun did arise, that God prepared a vehement east wind; and the sun beat upon the head of Jonah, that he fainted, and wished in himself to die, and said, It is better for me to die than to live.*

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angry, self-willed man. It is such an utterly pitiful sight. But the God of grace was far from finished with this man. Seems a bit of a shame to meet Jonah in such a lapse or down time in his life. There surely must have been good times of solid, faithful service in easier tasks. Yet here is perhaps where we really meet the man. The peeled Jonah is the real Jonah.

*“And the LORD God prepared a gourd...”* – Ah now the vital lesson begins. The grand finale! The main message of the book in fact.

*“But God prepared a worm...”* – The Lord giveth, and the Lord taketh away...blessed be the name of the Lord?

*“God prepared a vehement east wind...”* – Such a lot

4:9 *And God said to Jonah, Doest thou well to be angry for the gourd? And he said, I do well to be angry, even unto death.*

4:10 *Then said the LORD, Thou hast had pity on the gourd, for the which thou has not laboured, neither madest it grow; which came up in a night, and perished in a night:*

4:11 *And should not I spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than sixscore thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle?*

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of God's preparing here;

- Vs. 6 – The gourd.
- Vs. 7 – The worm.
- Vs. 8 – The wind.

And Jonah's initial exceeding gladness for the gourd was so quickly dashed to the depths of a third-time wish for death. Do not miss how it is all God's hand here in all that comes upon Jonah, both to positive and negative effect on him.

*“And God said to Jonah, Doest thou well to be angry for the gourd?”* – Again the Lord's graciously patient question. How brazen this man's insistence upon his right to fight the Lord's will. As if to say, “I have every right to stand opposed to Your purpose when it frustrates my own”.

Oh please consider with greatest care the Lord's closing point in vs. 10-11, put to His servant so gently reasonably;

“Jonah, you have such tender thoughts for the gourd (a *plant!*). Such exceeding joy at its growth. Such supreme sorrow at its loss. A *plant* Jonah, into which you have made no investment at all. Its death represents no loss of your labour. You did nothing to put it there or to maintain it. You have done no planting, no watering, no tending, no pruning, no nothing! You have expended no thought, no labour, no sacrifice, not a care. And for a mere *plant*, growing up and dying overnight. You did not even have the tender devotion of a gardener, labouring for the life of his plants. Yet at the same time you would deny *My* tender thoughts and affection for the souls of men and sorrow for their loss! Little children too young to make choices, too young to discern between right and left. People whom I have created, yea the crown of all My creation. People for whom I have laboured, the world of My own making. People fed and nurtured and provided for by Me. And *eternal souls*, Jonah, lasting immeasurably longer than your 24-hour gourd. Even the ‘cattle’ or sheep of this city have a life form far more valuable than your precious plant!”

Such penetrating logic. Such boundless grace.  
Such exposing contrast;

“You see Jonah, there is just one glaring difference between the plant you loved, and the people you hate. *The plant benefited you!!* You are quick to hold dear what comforts and benefits and gratifies you, dear Jonah. You mourn, not for the loss of the plant, but for *your* loss, the loss of your personal comfort! Something is of value to you only in so far as it profits *you*.”

Yet such contrast in the Lord;

“Jonah, I hold dear, not what benefits Me, but those whom *I delight to benefit*. In fact you and your people fall into that same category My dear friend. I benefit those who *do not* benefit Me, but who rather hate Me, and resist Me...Jonah!”

Of course the magnitude of that hatred is seen in man’s treatment of Jesus Christ. The treatment of the Jewish people in fact, that very nation more benefited by the Lord than any other on earth and throughout all time.

“I love, not those who first loved Me, but those whom I first loved” (compare Deuteronomy 7:7-8 & I John 4, “*We love Him because He first loved us*”). “I benefit those who cannot return an equal benefit

should they want to”.

Such a lesson in grace! The selfish holds dear what comforts and benefits the selfish, comparatively worthless items though they may be. The selfish hold dear anything or anyone helping them in their *self*-service. Grace holds dear those whom it holds dear, those it chooses and delights to benefit. Grace delights to benefit the other. Selfishness delights only to be benefited.

“Jonah, you delighted to be benefited, in your deliverance, and in the gourd. But I delight in benefiting, not just you, and your nation, but Mr. & Mrs. Everyman. As you have been exceedingly glad for the gourd and exceedingly sorry for its destruction, why can you not understand My exceeding joy for the Ninevite rescue and exceeding sorrow in their destruction? Your pain for the loss of the plant is nothing compared to Mine for the necessary destruction of souls. Jonah, I wish you to be as zealous and affectionate about the souls of men as you are about your own creature comforts. I wish that you were as overjoyed about the Ninevites and their release and relief from judgment as you were about your own release and relief from the fish and the sun and heat. Your distorted affections are an offence Jonah. Caring more for a vine than for human lives. Caring more for *yourself*

and your personal comfort, than for the destiny of eternal souls by the thousands.”

Jonah had scathingly implied a character flaw in God to so spare the Assyrians. But God has graciously exposed *Jonah* as the one with the flawed character, yea with a cold heart!

The strangely abrupt ending of this book was obviously an intentional thing, creating a forceful effect more striking and suggestive than if the thought had been chased or emphasized with repetitive detail. The vital message is left suspended, lingering like an aftertaste – a bitter one with relation to the man, but sweet in relation to our gracious God. We are left with God’s tenderly, amazingly patient voice ringing in our souls, telling of His love for all the lost, exposing man’s (Israel’s) inherent self-interest. The heart of *missions* is here, left before our thoughts as an undecided question, like a most beautiful, pricelessly dazzling ornament against the shocking black backdrop of man’s supreme selfishness. Shall we remain more interested in our own comforts than in the need of multitudes of lost souls dying in the darkness without the Saviour? Are we busy about our booths and happy about the gourds of God’s provision? Are we full of yearning over our comforts, possessions,

finances, etc., mourning their lack or loss yet *mindless* and *unfeeling* about the lost souls of this world's Ninevehs? We are just like Jonah, I'm afraid! Poles apart from the heart and purpose of the Lord. Oh we may not argue with Him over His grace to the lost as Jonah did, but when we thoughtlessly leave them to perish do we not accomplish the same thing? *Grace foregoes comforts to benefit others!* Here is the missionary spirit! Jesus Christ, the supreme Missionary, "*came not to be served, but to serve, even to give His life a ransom for many*" (Mk. 10:45). He "*loved the church, and gave Himself for it*" (Eph. 5).

*"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son"* (Jn. 3:16).

Now "*let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus*" (Phil. 2).

To have pity upon man in his lost condition is the whole thrust of the Bible's message and the very heart of the God we would claim for our own. The entire movement of the Lord throughout the course of history since man's fall into sin, the entire Bible theme encapsulated in this blessed little book is the redemption of mankind. Where would man be if the Lord had not pitied us in our fallen state? We see *God* here, graciously reaching out to the lost on the

one hand, and grappling with His errant child on the other. We see a God so patiently seeking those He would so fairly condemn, refusing to be hindered in His missionary purpose by the constricted heart of man, even using circumstances arising from man's rebellion to that same blessed end. How shall we not pick up on that same spirit and purpose of our God, when we ourselves have so benefited through it? Indeed every nation of men is in the same state of sin and resulting lost condition, in the same desperate need of God's pity. When it is indeed the Spirit *of God* within us, this will be our purpose as well, perfectly aligned with God's own heart. Any exclusive spirit arising in us that does not encompass a yearning after the eternal well-being of every man expresses no Spirit of God within us. If we would be as our God we will be no respecter of persons.

Though Jonah was of that privileged nation of God, he was in no position to look down upon any race of men. And how could the Jewish nation exclude any from God's salvation? Even within the very foundational promise to their father Abraham God revealed His purpose to bless all the families of the earth through Abraham and his resulting nation (Gen. 12:3).

Now while we are wringing out every precious drop from this blessed book, please allow me to interject a further, final thought. Look again at Jonah sitting there on that Assyrian hillside inwardly opposing his own peace in his unhappy conflict with the Lord his God. As we know, the Lord so graciously grew Jonah a gourd over-night as he sat there. Why? Well, partly for an object lesson of His grace, for the Lord was going to then take that gourd away in order to draw out Jonah's sorrow with its loss. An object lesson aimed at delivering Jonah from his grief through a heart put right with God and man. But another reason is given, "*that it might be a shadow over his head, to deliver him from his grief*". How good the Lord is to His antagonist! But think now. Had Jonah not already made a booth, that he might sit "*under it in the shadow [shade]*" (vs. 5)? Yet we are told in vs. 6 "*Jonah was exceedingly glad of the gourd*". It seems the Lord accomplished His purpose in its design to bring Jonah deliverance from his grief. But did he not already have a booth toward that same end? Yes he did. But Jonah could only have been so bursting with joy over the gourd because his shelter was far from adequate compared to the Lord's provision. Right? This gourd of the Lord brought the relief and deliverance for which God designed it, a deliverance obviously far superior to anything Jonah had made. Therefore

his exceeding joy with its gain and sorrow at its loss. Jonah's crude shelter obviously brought nothing comparable to what God's provision brought. Man's works never do folks! Man, in his opposition to the Lord, strives at shelter and finds it inadequate. God miraculously provides and it is adequate, and man is satisfied. One knows not how very inadequate his own efforts at shelter, until he experiences God's provision.

Even so man strives for his own righteousness, and God pronounces it as "*filthy rags*" (Isa. 64:6), inadequate, far short. "*But God*" alone provides mankind with true righteousness in Jesus Christ (Rom. 3:21). Man strives to attain salvation, and God says it cannot be done.

*"Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us"* (Titus 3:5).

*"But to him that worketh not but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness"* (Rom. 4:5).

*"A man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ...for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified"* (Gal. 2:16).

*"And by Him [Jesus Christ] all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be*

*justified by the law of Moses” (Acts 13:39).*

The Lord alone provides salvation by faith!

Man even strives to *keep* his salvation, but if his salvation is such that it must be kept by his own efforts, *it is inadequate!* Man strives to quench the thirst of his soul, and finds he cannot.

*“Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again;”* Jesus said to the woman at the well of Sychar, *“but whosoever drinketh of the water*

*that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life” (John 4).*

“The righteousness I give, the salvation I give, the satisfaction I give, more than meets the needs, as the gourd of the Lord making the receiver *‘exceedingly glad’*”. Man’s efforts, as Jonah’s booth, will always fall short no matter how energetic. Man’s priestly sacrifices must be continually renewed, where Christ’s sacrifice is once for all time, and God and man are satisfied alike.

Not only does the water Jesus gives quench to eternal salvation but it will abundantly overflow, spilling over to the benefit and refreshment of all around.

*“If any man thirst”, Jesus later said, “let him come unto Me and drink. He that believeth on Me as the Scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water” (Jn. 7:37-38).*

He speaks beyond just our satisfaction to our influence or imprint upon others.

Can man ever adequately provide for himself? Does man think he has laid up enough to provide for his needs? Ah, here come moth and mice. They will get it for sure. Does man think his provisions are adequately safeguarded against outside threat? Watch the mildew’s quiet work ruin it from within. Does man think himself fortified with an impenetrable fortress? Ah but he thinks not of the disease that reaches him and takes him from the inside, making a mockery of his careful fortifications. Whether providing for himself in this life or the next, man’s efforts without God are always like Jonah’s booth, inadequate, desperately needing the Lord’s miraculous touch. Even as every effort of man in the scene around the brass serpent in the wilderness fell deadly short (Num. 21:4-9; Jn. 3:14). Try any human effort they might, it would be a fatal failure for sure. Only God’s miraculous touch could deliver. Even so with salvation from sin. As Jonah learned and affirmed, *“salvation is of the Lord”*.

*“Except the Lord keep the city, the watchman wakes but in vain”* (Ps. 127:1).

Except the Lord be in it, what man attempts falls short. When God steps in, He accomplishes and it is enough. How constantly He drives us to Himself;

- **For deliverance** – *“I am the way, the truth, and the life”* (Jn. 14:6).
- **For protection** – *“I am your shield”* (Gen. 15:1).
- **For affirmation** – *“I am . . . your exceeding great reward”* (Gen. 15:1).
- **For provision** – *“I am the bread of life”* (Jn. 6), *“Man shall not live by bread alone”* (Matt. 4).
- **For righteousness** – *“And by Him all that believe are justified from all things, from which they could not be justified by the law of Moses”* (Acts 13:39).

Only the Lord can do for us and do it well! As they said of Jesus, *“He hath done all things well”* (Mk. 7:37).

I suspect Jonah just did not recognize how inadequate his shelter was until the gourd of the

Lord became his shelter. We think we are drinking well, until we taste living water. We think we are feeding fine on earthly husks, until we taste of heavenly manna. We think our life is filled full enough with joy, until we find the real joy of sin's pardon, God's presence, and Christ's yoke. We think we see enough here below, until our eyes are opened to heavenly realms as well, and the dimness we thought to be light is flooded with true light. We think we are satisfied, until we find true satisfaction in Jesus Christ.

“O taste and see, that the Lord is good;  
Jesus is the honey in the rock”

