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The Book of Jonah

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THE BOOK OF JONAH

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THE BOOK OF JONAH

CHAPTER I

Jonah

THIS book differs from those of the other prophets in that, while they are mostly occupied with the preaching of the prophet, this book gives in detail God's tender dealing with His servant. In this it is like the books of Job and Esther.

Through the other prophets God denounced the sins of the nations around, and spoke of the judgments that must fall upon them. Jonah gave the same clear testimony about sin and the certain judgment. But we read here of the heathen taking God's message to heart and repenting deeply. And we read also of God having mercy upon them, and saving them from judgment, and giving them the unspeakable blessing of a widespread outflowing of the Holy Spirit. This story of Revival in the Mission Field is unique in the Old Testament.

Jonah an historical person

As we read the book of Jonah, the story reads as if it were a true narration of facts and was not fiction.

Certainly Jonah was an historical person. He lived in the reign of the greatest of all the Kings of Israel, Jeroboam II. It was a time of very bitter affliction for Israel. The Assyrians had taken a good deal of their territory, and were likely to take more. And there seemed to be no helper for Israel, and no hope. But at that time Jonah was a prophet of hope and salvation. He received the Word of the Lord that the coast of Israel should be restored from the Assyrians "from the entering of Hamath to the sea of the plain." He believed God's promise, and proclaimed it confidently (2 Kings xiv. 25, 26). And God was faithful to His promise, and did so according to His servant's faithful and hopeful preaching, and "saved Israel by the hand of Jeroboam the son of Joash." All this shows that Jonah was an historical person.

Then the Lord Jesus spoke of him, and his story, as real history. He said that the men of Nineveh will come into the judgment, and that their repentance will condemn others who did not repent. The characters in fiction will never come into the judgment. This proves that Jonah really lived.

In the third place the Lord says that Jonah's experiences were the only sign that He would offer to the unbelieving Jews, who would not accept the many clear signs He was giving. And as He spoke the story of Jonah as a proof of His own

death and resurrection He speaks of it as a real historical event. Indeed one cannot imagine that He would use a fictitious story to prove His own resurrection. Christ also said that Nineveh repented at the preaching of Jonah, thus setting His seal to the truth of Jonah's mission.

Jonah's Commission

“Now the Word of the Lord came to Jonah.” Here is the clear statement that it was a message from God. This must be historical. No one would dare to write that if it were not true.

This was an authoritative word. We find that the Lord gave Jonah the same blessing, and another chance, in chapter iii. 1. “The Word of the Lord” was something different from “The Lord said,” chapter iv. 4, 9, 10. The latter implies God talking with Jonah as friend with friend, expostulating, pleading, seeking to guide and save him, appealing to his reason and conscience. “The Word of the Lord” is a clear-cut revelation, so that the man sees what otherwise he could not see, and knows it is true to fact; and hears what he otherwise would not hear, and knows that it is God's command that must be obeyed, and gives him clear guidance and commission as to what he is to do.

“The Word of the Lord came to Jonah” because God was supremely interested in Nineveh with the interest of Love. He must judge if they do not repent. So He will send a message of warning.

He chooses His servant Jonah for this high and holy work. To him is committed this work that is so near to God’s heart, and which is to bring the chance of salvation to Nineveh.

“ Arise and go ”

Jonah’s commission is “ Arise, go to Nineveh.”

Everyone has a Nineveh to go to, and to go to it he must die to self and simply trust God. The object of this command was the salvation of Nineveh. But it also was the salvation of Jonah. He needed to be brought to a real surrender to God, so that his life should be “ not I but Christ.” And he needed to be taught to trust and obey.

That same command “ Arise, and go ” came to Philip (Acts viii. 26) bidding him leave his happy work, and go forth, in order to lead one soul to Christ who would open the work in a continent. It came to Ananias (Acts ix. 11) bidding him go and face the terrible persecutor and lead him to Christ. It came to Peter (Acts x. 20) bidding him go and do the unheard-of thing, open the door of faith to the Gentiles. And it comes to each

faithful servant of the Lord now, bidding him go to some individual soul, or to some place or country.

This call and commission shows each one what their life may be, and how they can best be "blessed and be a blessing." It is God's call not to "abide alone" but to "fall into the ground and die" (John xii. 24).

Nineveh

That call was to go to Nineveh, and *cry against it*. That is to say, to tell them that God sees and knows, and that sin must bear its own bitter fruit. It was to tell them that God's wrath was upon them and judgment was at hand. It was indeed merciful of God to send them the warning, in the hope that they would repent and He could save them. But it was not the same message as that of the Gospel, "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son," that "all should be saved" (John iii. 16; 1 Tim. ii. 4) corresponding to the cry of the heathen soul, "come over and help us."

But their wickedness had come up before God. In the case of Sodom and Gomorrah, whose cry also came up to Him (Gen. xviii. 21), He thoroughly investigated it and saw it was so, but was willing in mercy to warn them before judgment

was sent. And so He does with the individual now. He "sets our iniquities before Him, and our secret sins in the light of His countenance" (Ps. xc. 8). And one sees in that holy light how "exceeding sinful" they must seem.

Tarshish

It may have been that the call of God came again and again to Jonah. And that God pressed it upon him whenever he drew near to Him in prayer. It is often so now. But Jonah did not yield. And so, to save himself from the pricks of conscience and to get away from God's presence, he at last determined to flee to Tarshish. God had said "Nineveh" clearly, but the devil whispered "Tarshish." Jonah chose, and chose wrong. He knew he had had the Word of the Lord to go to Nineveh. But he preferred to go to Tarshish, and so chose that.

But he tried to do the impossible when he tried to get away from the presence of the Lord, and from the sound of His voice. "Whither shall I flee from thy presence" the Psalmist asks in Ps. cxxxix. 7, and answers "If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea EVEN THERE shall thy right hand hold me. If I make my bed in hell behold thou art there." Jonah did not realise that now, but

afterwards he found it out, and found that God could save him even out of the "belly of hell."

A Convenient Ship

So Jonah goes down to Joppa. And finds a ship ready to sail to Tarshish. The devil always has a ship ready and convenient, for the man who is fleeing from God. And God allows it, as a test for the man. Temptation throws open the door. Is the man strong enough to resist, and not to enter the door? His inclinations are all to enter the door, but did not the Lord plainly say "Nineveh"? Shall he take the irrevocable step of disobedience?

He pays the fare. It always costs to disobey God. Adam sinned, and the cost was the Garden of Eden. King Saul disobeyed, and it cost him his kingdom. Ananias sinned and it cost him his life. The "fare" always has to be paid.

But Jonah thinks he has got rid of an unpleasant duty for ever. Why should he bear the cross, and "fall into the ground and die"? His own way seems far preferable to God's way, which was the way of the Cross. But it is leading him downhill all the way. He "went down to Joppa," and then "went down into the ship" (ver. 2) and then "went down into the sides of the ship" (ver. 5).

All the time he is going down. And the backslider is ever on a course that leads downhill. He probably does not perceive it. But his joy decreases, his power vanishes, his communion is lost, his peace gradually departs. How different is the pathway of the righteous man, which shines more and more unto the perfect day; for it is ever "upward and onward." "Still upward, still upward, still upward" (Ezek. xli. 7).

The Lord steps in

Jonah has planned, and has reckoned it an easy thing to flee from the presence of the Lord. But though man proposes, God disposes, and carries out His own Will. Jonah cannot escape God. A criminal may flee, but the police are warned in all the country round, and he is soon taken.

In Psalm xxxii. 8, 9, God speaks of two ways in which He guides His people. The first one is guidance with the eye. He finds it easy to guide one who is willing to be guided and on the look out for it. But if He tries thus to guide and His child is indifferent to His signs, or rebellious, He must put on "bit and bridle" as a driver does upon a stubborn mule which refuses gentle methods, and will not do the work. So the Lord had to put on "bit and bridle" to Jonah. And

Jonah found that his own way led him on lower and lower, to terror and death.

A Mighty Tempest

So the Lord "thrust out" a great wind to stop Jonah, and a mighty tempest arose. The ship was like to be broken.

All nature is under the Lord's control and is used of Him to bring His servant to repentance and blessing. The stormy wind fulfils His word, and the great fish. Also the gourd and the little unseen worm. And the east wind. He upholds and guides all things by the word of His power and makes all things work together to lead thee to repentance (Rom. ii. 4).

The mighty tempest terrified the sailors. They feel that somehow God is in it, and that their only chance is to pray. But the one to whom God would specially speak, is wholly indifferent to His voice, and is fast asleep. Disobedience always leads to spiritual drowsiness and sleep. But while the people of God sleep, the world around them, like these sailors, is in sore distress and in fear of perishing. Jonah is asleep in the midst of many, in trouble that he has caused.

The captain would wake him up and bids him pray. Truly, the unconverted often know what a Christian ought to do better than a Christian

who is hardened in his indifference. But to pray is just what Jonah cannot do. Prayer cannot avail if the heart is unyielded to God.

The sailors cast forth the wares to lighten the ship. But though precious things are thrown out, no peace is found. And if God is dealing with us, we may yield many things up, but if we do not throw out the right thing, we shall not find peace. And the right thing is that about which God has a controversy with us.

God points him out

The sailors cast lots to see who it is with whom God has a controversy. And the lot falls upon Jonah.

Thus God will ever bring sin to light. And the hidden things shall be proclaimed upon the housetops. "Thou hast set our secret sins in the light of Thy countenance." So be sure your sin will find you out, for the Lord will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the secret counsels of the heart. Ps. xc. 8 ; Num. xxxii. 23 ; 1 Cor. iv. 5.

Jonah is unable to deny it, and in response to their questions, gives his clear testimony. "I fear the Lord God of heaven which hath made the sea and the dry land." And he humbly confesses his unfaithfulness to the God whom he

ought to have followed, and tells that he "flees from the presence of the Lord." He had the right faith, but had not lived up to it.

The heathen sailors are shocked as they hear of his sin and exclaim, "Why hast thou done this?" and ask him, "What shall we do?" that will make the sea calm. Is there a remedy for sin?

The Awful Effects of Sin

A disobedient child of God not only brings chastisement upon himself, but is also a danger to others. His chastisement affects others also, especially those near to him. Jonah's sin brings a mighty tempest upon all that sail with him. On the other hand, Paul in the shipwreck brought blessing and safety to all who were with him (Acts xxvii). For the man upon whom are the eyes of the Lord, and who is living in the sunshine of His countenance, is a help and protection to all around him. They share with him in the blessing of God. And so, one wicked city is saved by ten righteous men dwelling there (Gen. xviii. 32), for God's grace always overflows its object.

Jonah knows that, as Achan troubled Israel (Joshua vii. 25) he is the one who is troubling the whole ship. And that Achan must be destroyed before Israel can get peace again. . . And

he shows that he acknowledges his sin and repents of it by "sorrowing after a godly sort" (2 Cor. vii. 11). He offers himself as a sacrifice. "Take me up and cast me into the sea."

And the sailors show that they are worthy men. "They rowed hard to bring the ship to land." But all their efforts were useless. They would like to save Jonah, but they could not. For nothing will bring peace till sin is cast out. Who can fight against God's judgment? "The sea wrought and was tempestuous against them." The sailors feel that God is compelling them to do it, and so they turn to the Lord God (ver. 14), and not "every man to his own God" (ver. 5), and plead with Him for forgiveness if their action is wrong, and "cast Jonah forth into the sea."

The sailors converted. Jonah preserved

"The sea ceased her raging" and so God showed that He approved, and gave them the token of His peace. The sudden calm was evidently the work of God, and touched the hearts of these men. They surely were converted by it. "Then the men feared the Lord exceedingly." And the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom and of saving grace. And "they offered a sacrifice unto the Lord" to get sins forgiven, and find peace with Him. And "they

made vows " that they would serve Him in the future. So through Jonah's sacrifice was he not " given all who sailed with him " even as Paul was (Acts xxvii. 24) ?

But though God seems to cast off His servant, He will not do so. He will save, though Jonah is in the lowest depths of sin and distress. God has His way ready. He is not taken by surprise. All nature is under His control, " the sea and all that is therein." And so a great fish swallows up Jonah. And this is not for Jonah's destruction, but to teach and to cure him. It is God's school for His servant, where he will learn valuable lessons. Let us have grace to serve God acceptably with reverence, and godly fear, for our God is a consuming fire (Heb. xii. 28, 29).

CHAPTER II

“Jonah prayed”

“THEN Jonah prayed . . .” Will his prayer be of any avail? Will it be any good? He is cast out by God and by man, what is the good of such an one praying? He is cast out as far as possible, with every token of God’s displeasure upon him, God’s face turned away from him. But he prays unto the Lord his God, out of the fish’s belly.

If Jonah could pray under such circumstances, if Jonah could pray after his sin and rebellion and hardness, if Jonah could pray from that place and in that condition, anyone whatever can pray, and anyone whatever can be heard, and we may pray boldly, whatever our condition is. “Then Jonah prayed.”

It was a wonder that he should do so—sin generally hardens the heart, but Jonah prayed. When the Lord wanted to give Ananias in Damascus a sure proof that Saul of Tarsus was really converted, he said this: “Behold, he prayeth.” It was wonderful that Saul of Tarsus should be really praying, and that was the token to Ananias that Saul of Tarsus was convicted and converted.

“Then Jonah prayed . . .” and that is a token to us that his heart was changed, and that he had now got instruction from the way God had dealt with him. “Jonah prayed . . .”

What encouragement this is for those who have disobedient children, or disobedient friends who seem to be going away from the Presence of God and casting God behind their backs! What encouragement this first verse is, that God’s hand can reach them even when they are cast out from God’s Presence altogether—even when they are in a hopeless condition and it seems as if nothing possibly can save them—then God is still able to save—able to reach them with His voice and to draw them with His Grace into newness of life. And so well may we pray on for such, in hope and expectation.

Jonah and the Prodigal

“Jonah prayed unto the Lord his God out of the fish’s belly.” You may well compare that with Luke xv. Had not the prodigal gone the same way as Jonah, turning his back upon his father’s house and upon his father’s love, to have his own way? Jonah, too, thought it was better to go to Tarshish than to go to Nineveh and obey God. And like the prodigal he was brought to the lowest condition, to the very belly of Hell.

He had wholly disregarded God's ways, and yet he too prayed. He came to himself and prayed and looked to his Father.

Experiences like Jonah's

"Jonah prayed unto the Lord his God out of the fish's belly." Let us turn back to the Psalms. We find this again and again in the Psalms, that is to say, again and again we find people in this same spiritual condition. And even in that condition, praying to the Lord, and getting answers from God. The Psalms are a wonderful mirror of human experience, of all sorts of human experience, and again and again we find Jonahs praying in the fish's belly and getting answered.

In the Sixty-first Psalm we read, "Hear my cry, O God: attend unto my prayer. From the end of the earth I will cry unto thee, when my heart is overwhelmed: lead me to the rock that is higher than I. For thou hast been a shelter for me, and a strong tower from the enemy. I will abide in thy tabernacle for ever: I will trust in the covert of thy wings. Selah." ". . . From the end of the earth"—that is to say from the furthest point away from God, from the very furthest distances from God, even there "I will cry unto thee," even though "my heart is overwhelmed," I will pray. That is my resource.

Look on to Psalm cxx, and read, "In my distress I cried unto the Lord and He heard me." The next few verses show what a hell he was living in. He said: "Woe is me, that I sojourn in Mesech, that I dwell in the tents of Kedar! My soul hath long dwelt with him that hateth peace." And yet in my distress I cried unto the Lord and He heard me. This man in his distress realised that God was still able to save and to bless, and the prayer still would be answered.

Look on to Psalm cxxx. "Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O Lord." This is another Jonah experience. He is in the depths, furthest from God, "out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O Lord, O Lord, hear my voice, let thine ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications. If thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand? But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared."

And look again into the Lamentations. In the third chapter of Lamentations we find the lamentations of those who are indeed cast out of God's Presence and who are indeed in the utmost distress. In chapter iii. 54, "Waters flowed over mine head, then I said, I am cut off. I called upon thy name, O Lord, out of the low dungeon. Thou hast heard my voice: hide not thine ear at my breathing, at my cry." He is put into the lowest dungeon and yet even there he knows that he can

pray, and even from thence his voice is heard, and God answers.

If we look on to the fourth chapter of the Epistle to the Romans we see a story of another who prayed in a hopeless condition. Romans iv. 17 speaks of Abraham's experience: "As it is written, I have made thee a father of many nations, before him whom he believed, even God, who quickeneth the dead, and calleth those things which be not as though they were. Who against hope believed in hope." This is another Jonah prayer. Abraham was in a condition in which it seemed as if his prayer could not be answered. But even from that lowest condition he prayed. He believed that God quickens the dead. So even then he could pray the prayer of faith. He believed in a God of resurrection, a God who raises the dead, a God who can do the most wonderful things, for it is only God who can raise the dead. And if God could do that, he believed that God could do the impossible for him (Heb. xi. 19). And that is what Jonah did. "He prayed to God out of the fish's belly," believing God could raise him even from the dead. And that God did.

Now if we pray in faith, believing in the God of Resurrection, a God who raises the dead, and if he can do that most wonderful of all miracles, surely he can answer your prayer. Jonah believed

in a God who could do a miracle like that, and so
“Jonah prayed unto the Lord his God.”

Jonah's Prayer

Let us look at the prayer itself. Now this is a remarkable prayer. We find that it is impregnated with Holy Scripture. He quotes nine Psalms. I advise you to look out all the references given in your Bible. You will find it a most instructive and helpful recreation, and you will see by the references that Jonah's prayer is almost entirely made up of Scripture. It is a good thing to have Scripture in your memory. It is a good thing to have Scripture that you can quote. It makes prayer powerful when we bring to God His own Word. And Jonah's mind must have been full of Scripture so that when he got into this very difficult place it naturally came to him, and he prayed in the words of Scripture. In the Psalms he found a description of the condition that he was in. One who passed through some of the most terrible scenes in the Great War said to me how he found the Psalms gave just the help that was needed under such conditions, and that again and again verses of the Psalms came to his mind that he had never thought of much in the past. They seemed to be exactly what he needed at the time.

Assurance that prayer is heard

That is just what Jonah finds here. He said, "I cried by reason of my affliction unto the Lord and he heard me." Jonah has got the assurance that God hears prayer and he begins his prayer with that assurance. "He heard me." He has not got any experience of the answer to his prayer yet but he has the assurance that God has heard. "Out of the belly of hell cried I, and thou heardest my voice."

Look back to Psalm xxxiv. This Psalm is a wonderful Psalm of deliverance. Again and again in this Psalm we find how God answered prayer and delivered. In the sixth verse: "This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of his troubles." And so Jonah is praying here and expecting God to deliver him. "For thou hadst cast me into the deep, in the midst of the sea, and the floods compassed me about: all thy billows and thy waves passed over me." He is not bitter towards the sailors or the captain of the vessel that he was sailing in, he takes it all from God's hand. He realises that it is all the outcome of his own sin, and was nobody else's fault. So he takes the punishment from God's hands. "Thou hast cast me into the deep."

Out of God's sight

Will you look back to Psalm lxxxviii—the Psalm of deepest distress perhaps in all the Book of Psalms? In verse 3, “Free among the dead, like the slain that lie in the grave, whom thou rememberest no more: and they are cut off from thy hand. Thou hast laid me in the lowest pit, in darkness, in the deeps. Thy wrath lieth hard upon me, and thou hast afflicted me with all thy waves. Selah.”

That was Jonah's experience. It is the experience of every sinner who has turned against God. He may not realise it, but that is his experience. And Jonah, even in that experience, cries unto the Lord. He says in the fourth verse, “Then I said, I am cast out of thy sight; yet will I look again toward thy holy temple.” Out of thy sight! Why, that is just where he wanted to get. In chapter i. 3, “Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the Presence of the Lord,” and again, “he went down into it, to go with them unto Tarshish from the Presence of the Lord.” And again it is repeated in the tenth verse, “. . . the men knew that he fled from the Presence of the Lord.”

Three times over in that chapter he states that. The Presence of God was what Jonah was afraid of. But now he says, “I am cast out of thy sight,”

he is frightened that he is out of God's sight. He has fled from the Presence of God and now, having turned his back on God, he is frightened about his position. He finds he is cast out of God's sight. Sinners, again and again, do just that thing, they are frightened of God's Presence, and when they realise that they have successfully turned their backs on God, then they are still more frightened at what they have done.

Looking to God's Abode

But Jonah did not give up hope. "Yet I will look again toward thy holy temple," he says. "Yet will I pray unto thee." In Solomon's great prayer at the dedication of the Temple, he asks God that such a prayer should be answered. In 1 Kings viii. 38, "What prayer and supplication soever be made by any man or by all thy people Israel, which shall know every man the plague of his own heart, and spread forth his hands towards this house: Then hear thou in heaven thy dwelling place, and forgive, and do, and give to every man according to his ways, whose heart thou knowest; (for thou, even thou only, knowest the hearts of all the children of men)." So here Jonah is looking once more to the place of God's abode and expects God's answer.

His hopeless condition

But he goes on in the fifth and sixth verses to confess the terrible condition he is in, "The waters compassed me about even to the soul; the depth closed round about me, the weeds were wrapped about my head. I went down to the bottoms of the mountains; the earth with her bars was about me for ever." It seemed a hopeless condition. He said these bars were about him "for ever." He did not expect ever to escape from them. He could not believe there was deliverance, till at last he turned to God. "The earth with her bars was about me for ever."

If you will turn to Psalm lxix. 1, you will find just the same experience. "Save me, O God; for the waters are come in unto my soul. I sink in deep mire, where there is no standing; I am come into deep waters, where the floods overflow me."

Possibly human language could not more clearly describe the full depths of woe into which sinners come, and which they realise when they are convicted of their sin. "The waters are come in unto my soul," and yet, in the fourth verse, "I will look again toward thy holy temple." And then in the sixth verse, "yet hast thou brought up my life from corruption." That looking again unto God has brought its answer.

God has heard the prayer, and God has brought up his life from corruption. He has not yet found that experience. But in faith he believes it is coming; he believes God will answer prayer, even though he was in a hopeless condition. Humanly speaking there was no hope at all, and yet he says, "thou hast brought up my life from corruption, O Lord my God."

He remembers God

You see in the first verse it says he prayed unto the Lord "his God." God was still "his," though he had turned his back on him. Now in his prayer he says just the same thing, "O Lord my God." That possessive pronoun "My God" is just the token of his faith, he still lays hold of God, he still holds the hand of God in his hand, and he cries, "O Lord, my God. When my soul fainted within me I remembered the Lord."

So often when people's souls faint within them, their hearts are hardened, and they forget God, but mercifully when his soul fainted he remembered the Lord. You will find the same in Psalm xlii. 6, "O my God, my soul is cast down within me: therefore will I remember thee from the land of Jordan, and of the Hermonites, from the hill Mizar. Deep calleth unto deep at the noise of thy waterspouts: all thy waves and thy billows

are gone over me. Yet the Lord will command his loving kindness in the daytime, and in the night his song shall be with me, and my prayer unto the God of my life." He was going through a Jonah experience. His soul was cast down, yet he will remember God. From the furthest place, from the uttermost parts away from God he will remember God. And so he knows his prayer "comes in" unto the Lord.

He had followed a lying voice. And he has learnt what are the wages of it. "They that observe lying vanities forsake their own mercy." He had experienced that. He had listened to the devil's voice which was a lying voice. It was a voice of vanity, that is to say, a voice of emptiness. He had listened to what the devil said, that it would be better at Tarshish than at Nineveh. He had observed lying vanities, and so he had turned his back on his own mercy and on his own enjoyment. He expected to find a quiet life at Tarshish; but instead of that, he had forsaken all blessing and mercy and help. Out of his own experience he had proved this.

A sacrifice for sin

But now instead of following the voice of the devil he is going to follow the voice of the Lord. He has yielded to God; he is going to do all that

God says. In the ninth verse, "I will sacrifice unto thee," that is to say, "I will plead the precious blood." The sacrifice that is on the altar, the sacrifice that takes away sin. I have no other standing before thee. There is no other hope beside the precious blood. "I will sacrifice unto thee with the voice of thanksgiving"; thanking God for the way of salvation; thanking God for the Cross, even when deeply convicted of our own sin, still with the voice of thanksgiving, thanking God that He so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son.

"I will pay that that I have vowed." I have made these promises to Thee believing that I have been moved by Thy Holy Spirit and I will carry them out; I will fulfil these things as I know that Thou wilt fulfil Thy promises and bring up my life from corruption. So I will pay that which I have vowed.

The Confession of Faith

And then he makes the great confession of faith. "Salvation is of the Lord." Not by my own effort, not by going my own way as I tried to in the past. Salvation is of the Lord. He is the only one who saves and satisfies. He only can do it and I will trust Him. That is Jonah's great confession, and having made that confession

he gets liberty at once. He rises into a resurrection life at once, "out of death into life." And when a sinner is called out of death into life it means something like this tenth verse. It is the experience of Jonah—"Out of death into life."

In prayer he finds the way out

So Jonah prayed unto the Lord, and his prayer embodies all the main emotions that ought to be in a praying heart. And his prayer brought resurrection. Because of his prayer he found the way out. There are many souls who pray and never get out. They never get into the liberty, into the open air once more. They never get delivered from the billows and the waves and the weeds and the bars round about them. They never find liberty. Now here is a prayer that brought liberty, that brought resurrection, that brought divine power, so that he was free from all that he had gone through.

Once more look over the prayer, and you will find:—

1. *Vision.* There is a clear vision of his terrible condition. The fifth and sixth verses speak of it. Cast out from God's sight, compassed about with the waters.

2. *Humble confession.* He confesses it. He confesses it is God's punishment. It is not merely that the sailors have thrown him overboard, but it is God's punishment. He says that he is cast into the deep. "Thou hadst cast me into the deep, in the midst of the seas." In the fourth verse he says he is cast out from God, and all God's waves are passing over him.

3. *Hope.* Yet he prays with expectation. "I cried out of the belly of hell, and thou heardest my voice." He prays taking for granted that God will hear and God will answer. He prays, "Yet hast thou brought up my life from corruption, O Lord my God."

4. *Surrender.* And he yields himself to God. "I will pay that that I have vowed." He sees clearly "Salvation is of the Lord." And he gets the experience of newness of life. Thus by the prayer of faith he is delivered from all the waves and the billows and brought out on to dry land, into the resurrection life, into fulness of blessing.

And God is the same today. Wherever we may be spiritually, even if we have been cast out of his sight because of our sin, we may pray and be delivered wholly. From all the darkness and all the bondage and all the awful fear, right out into the liberty of Christ.

CHAPTER III

A second call

“AND the Word of the Lord came unto Jonah the second time.”

The second call. What wonderful grace that was, after all Jonah's failure, after Jonah's rebellion that God should call him a second time; and be prepared still to commission him, and send him forth! We see such grace again in the nineteenth chapter of the first book of Kings where Elijah flees from the face of Jezebel and God meets him and says, “What doest thou here, Elijah?” God does not cast him away but commissions him again. “Go and anoint Jehu the son of Nimshi to be king over Israel; and Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abelmeholah shalt thou anoint to be prophet in thy room.” He still uses him in His grace. I dare say after his failure and denial of the Lord, Peter thought that his apostleship was at an end. But the Lord's forgiveness meant that Peter was to be restored as formerly. So the Lord asks him: “Lovest thou Me?” and then commissions him, “Feed My lambs, feed My sheep.” Even so Jonah is called again to service. What wonderful grace!

God no doubt has dealt in grace like that with everyone here who has failed and sinned against

God. God will still use him and send him forth a second time.

Now Jonah had been saved. In the second chapter we read his prayer, and in answer to that salvation came. Wasn't that mercy enough for Jonah? No, God gives him this added mercy: not merely saved, but once more called to work. What wonderful mercy it is that we have not been cast away! Paul, even, was afraid that he should be cast away. I do not think he was afraid that he would lose his salvation, but he was afraid he would lose his ministry and his work. That was a wholesome, holy fear on Paul's part and we should have such fear in our hearts also. We are apt too much to take for granted that God will allow us to continue in His work. Let us fear lest we should be cast away.

God's Test

“And the Word of the Lord came unto Jonah the second time, saying, ‘Arise, go unto Nineveh.’”—what he had refused to do before. God is testing him now. Jonah had professed repentance in the fish's belly, and if we profess repentance and faith, God will always test us. And God here tests his repentance; God is not going to allow him just to go back to his own

village, and live a quiet life forgiven, but God says, "Are you now willing to do that which you refused to do?" And that is a searching question. But Jonah has learnt something in the interval. Jonah has learnt obedience. I hardly dare to quote the words "obedience by the things he suffered." Those words apply to Christ Himself, and it seems rather degrading to apply them to a sinning prophet, but nevertheless it is true that he learnt by the things he suffered and what he learnt was a lesson of obedience. And it is good when the things that we suffer teach us that great lesson of obedience—"Not my will, but Thine, be done."

A God-given message

"Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee." God gives him the place and God gives him the preaching to preach. He gave Ananias the house and the street that he was to go to, and what he was to say (Acts ix). So here Jonah receives an order commanding the place, and also the message. ". . . Preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee." No preacher has any right to preach anything else than what he has received from God, and been taught by God.

Will you turn to Numbers xxii. 35? "And the angel of the Lord said unto Balaam: Go with the men: but only the word that I shall speak unto thee, that thou shalt speak." And would you look at Jeremiah i. 17? "Therefore gird up thy loins, and arise, and speak unto them all that I command thee." That was just what the Lord Jesus Himself did, as a Preacher. He only spoke the words that the Father gave Him (John viii. 26, 28). As we read in 1 Cor. ii. 13, "the words that the Holy Ghost teaches." Oh, that we may learn obedience in what we preach, receiving from God and passing it on—"preach unto them the preaching that I give thee."

So Jonah went

"So Jonah arose, and went . . ." and so far it was very good, it was right that he should "arise and go," in obedience to what God had told him. And yet he seems to go merely as a matter of duty. He has learnt his lesson now in the storm, and in the whale's belly, and he is going to do his duty. He is not going out of love for God, he is not going out of love for the unsaved, and a burden for their condition—he is going out of simple duty. And service done from a principle of duty—well, it is good that it

should be done—but it will not have the same power in it as service done from love. “Jonah arose and went.”

Jonah in Nineveh

“Now Nineveh was an exceeding great city of three days’ journey.” We learn from secular literature that Nineveh was ninety miles round. It was an exceeding great city. This prophet had come from a far away province, and it may well have appalled him as he saw the city walls and saw the greatness of the city for the first time. It may well have discouraged him, and brought fear into his heart. But he boldly goes forward, “and Jonah began to enter into the city a day’s journey.”

Now the Lord Jesus tells us that the Ninevites shall rise up in judgment with his generation, and therefore we know that this is an historical incident. For characters in fiction will not rise up in judgment. He tells us also that Jonah was a sign to the Ninevites and that probably very much helped Jonah’s preaching.

Jonah a Sign

Jonah was a sign to the Ninevites. Probably the news of his being cast overboard and being

still alive had got to Nineveh. No doubt these sailors had turned back to Joppa, and had got there even before Jonah got there, for he was three days and three nights in the whale's belly. Probably they had gone back to harbour to get another cargo, and they were spreading the news of the prophet being cast overboard ; and he had appeared and told the people of Joppa how God has answered his prayer and that he was alive.

It must have seemed to the people of Joppa a miracle, that a man who was practically dead should be alive again. And there was such constant communication with Nineveh that the news of such an extraordinary event would spread there, and when the prophet appeared he was a sign to the Ninevites. He was to them the man who had been dead but who was risen again. A sign of God's severity and of God's grace. And every preacher ought to be a sign to others. He ought to be a resurrection man, a man who died in sin and has risen again, a sign of God's severity and a sign of God's grace ; a sign of the wonders of answered prayer. For what the preacher is, is far more important than what he preaches. Oh, that we may be clearly a sign to the unconverted, a token of God's grace and of God's wonderful salvation.

The preaching of coming woe

“Jonah began to enter into the city a day’s journey, and he cried and said, ‘Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown.’” Forty days of grace. There was still time. God gave that time for repentance as in wonderful mercy He does to every sinner: “yet forty days.” No doubt Jonah reiterated this message again and again, perhaps at every street corner. We need not be afraid of preaching again and again the same thing. John the Baptist preached again and again, “Repent ye, for the Kingdom of the Lord is at hand.” And the Lord Jesus took up John’s sermon and preached it. “Repent ye, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.” And it is a truth that needed hammering into the hearts of all and so he gives it again and again, as Jonah does here—a clear reiterated message. “Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown.” As Paul says, “Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord we persuade men.” He knew the future for every unrepentant sinner, and therefore moved by desire for their salvation he preached that word again and again.

Faith and Sackcloth

Well, a wonderful thing happened—“So the people of Nineveh believed God.” We are not

told that they believed Jonah but they believed God. God's power was so manifestly in the message that they believed God. They received the Word as the Thessalonians received it, not as the word of man, but as it is in truth, the Word of God. They believed God and put on sackcloth. There is always the closest connection between these two. Faith always leads to sackcloth. Believing God always leads to a penitent and contrite spirit. Faith always brings the sinner to his knees, on his face before God, crying, "Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Thy loving kindness: according unto the multitude of Thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions." That is the heart-broken cry that faith produces. Faith brings us to sackcloth.

Turning from evil ways

They proclaimed a fast, the greatest of them even unto the least of them put on sackcloth. We read in history of the Persians doing the same thing—putting the signs of mourning and conviction even upon their animals, when foes were pressing and they were crying to God. So it is here. And they said very much what we read in the second chapter of Joel, "Who can tell if God will turn and repent?" So God saw their works. There was not only belief and sackcloth, but

works meet for repentance. God saw their works, that they turned from their evil ways, and God repented. They repented, so God repented. God rejoices to be able to repent of what He said must happen to sinners if they do not turn. They repented, and so God repented.

CHAPTER IV

WE have read in these three chapters three signal instances of salvation. In the first chapter we read of the sailors being saved by grace. The sailors were saved from the storm, and the men feared the Lord exceedingly. In the second chapter we read that Jonah was saved in answer to prayer. And in the third chapter we read of Nineveh being saved by repentance.

Nineveh Saved

And so Nineveh is saved. God is rejoicing. No doubt all heaven is rejoicing. "Rejoice with me for I have found that which I had lost." All heaven is rejoicing, "but it displeased Jonah exceedingly." He was out of sympathy with God. Jonah saw wonderful results from his preaching. But great results do not prove that the man is walking with God.

The Preacher, wrong in Soul

We may well be warned by the solemn truth that success in ministry does not prove that one is right with God. Here we see Jonah is not of one mind with God. He had seen a wonderful sight that he did not expect to see—Nineveh in

sackcloth. Nineveh crying mightily unto God, the true God. But it displeases Jonah. That is just the spirit of the elder brother of the prodigal son. He is displeased at all the joy and merriment at the prodigal's return; and Jonah "was very angry."

"And he prayed unto the Lord." It is good that it brought him to his knees. There was something of God's grace in this man that his exceeding anger made him pray. It must have been that he was ashamed of his anger and that he felt it was in some way wrong. It is good to get down on your knees, if you feel angry or distressed; and just talk it out with the Lord. "He prayed unto the Lord."

Jonah's Creed

Then he gives a wonderful testimony to God. Jonah had a very clear sight of God and God's grace and God's glory. Listen to what he said: "I knew that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil." That is a wonderful creed and I think that Jonah really held that creed. He really knew that God was like that, that God was gracious and merciful, slow to anger and of great kindness. This description of God is very grand. I doubt if we can find a grander

faith even in the New Testament. It is good if our faith rises to this.

But he continues : “ Therefore now, O Lord, take, I beseech thee, my life from me ; for it is better for me to die than to live.” He was feeling that his preaching was proved untrue. He had prophesied that Nineveh was going to be destroyed and, instead of that, Nineveh was saved. His prophecy being proved untrue is more distress to him than the fact that he is out of harmony with God. God is rejoicing while he is in the depths of distress, and he does not seem to mind that.

He says : “ It is better for me to die than to live.” Well, it is good to be able to say that. Paul said, “ I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart and to be with Christ which is far better.” Jonah must have had a clear assurance of everlasting salvation for him to say “ It is better for me to die than to live.” Yet it was wrong for him to say it then. It shows that he was wrong with God.

God's Question

“ Then said the Lord, Doeſt thou well to be angry ? ” It seems as if the Lord left him with that question. God often leaves his servants with a question. It may be at night when you

cannot sleep, that there is a question in your heart. God is leaving you to question out something, and to give Him an answer.

Jonah gives up preaching

“ 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.” Instead of being a preacher he is a watcher. It would have been far better if he had gone into Nineveh preaching what he said about God at the end of the second verse. How the people would have received a message like that! They were only wondering whether by any chance God would repent of the evil. If Jonah had told them that He would and that He does, that message would have been very acceptable and would have surely confirmed the revival.

We know that the revival was not lasting. We know from other prophets that Nineveh went back to its sin and was destroyed soon after that. Dr. Layard excavated the ruins in 1850. The higher critics used to say that there never was such a city as Nineveh because it had entirely disappeared from the face of the earth. Then the city was excavated and it was proved that it was a real city. And if Jonah had, perhaps, gone

back preaching instead of watching, the work might have been established, and Nineveh might have been permanently saved, instead of only temporarily.

Watch God's Work

But Jonah goes out and sits in a booth that he might see what would become of the city. There is something there for us to learn. There are times when it is well for us to sit quietly and watch—watch what God will do. We may have done our part according to what God has ordered us. And then it may be time for us to watch and pray and see what God will do, what shall the result be. Jonah sits there that he may see what will become of the city.

God's Care

“And the Lord 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.” There were two objects—a shadow over his head to take care of his body, and to deliver him from his grief, and to save his soul; to help his body and his mind. And God again and again has provided for the bodies of His people. He provided for Elijah in 1 Kings xix, when the angel brought

the water and the bread for him to eat. The Lord Jesus provided for the bodies of His hungry, wet disciples, in the twenty-first chapter of John when they had been toiling all night and caught nothing. He had got a good deal to say to them but His first thought is to prepare a breakfast, and it was only "after they had dined" that He began to speak to them. Even so here. The Lord in His grace prepares a gourd for Jonah's body that Jonah may be delivered from his grief. Something in nature like that, may be God's gift to you, to help you, and comfort you in a time of distress.

His shallow emotions

"So Jonah was exceeding glad of the gourd." He was exceedingly displeased in the second verse, in the sixth verse he is exceedingly glad. How quickly God turns sadness into gladness! I dare say each one of us could remember instances when He had done that for us. He did it here, He turned Jonah's sadness into gladness and gives him a refuge where he can be shaded and delivered from his grief. "So Jonah was exceeding glad of the gourd," and yet how shallow that is, how paltry that is. God had been exceeding glad when Nineveh repented. God had rejoiced with exceeding joy then, "but Jonah was displeased."

Jonah is not exceeding glad when a whole city is saved, but he is exceeding glad when some little trivial comfort is given to his body. And we may well search our own hearts over that. Has some temporal comfort brought gladness to our hearts which the tidings of salvation, the salvation of others, has not brought? We have not been moved when we heard of others being saved, but we have been exceeding rejoiced at some little comfort that is given to us.

The worm and the wind

Such a source of comfort, as the gourd, always has a worm in it, and it won't last long. God will always test out joy, whether it is lasting or not, He will just test it to see whether it is joy like Habakkuk's joy. That lasted though the grapes did not flourish, and the fig tree did not blossom. But this joy is a more shallow joy and God will test it. God prepares the worm, and the gourd withers away and with it Jonah's joy.

“And it came to pass, when the sun did arise, that God prepared a vehement east wind.” God prepared the gourd, God prepared the worm, God prepared an east wind; God was patiently dealing with His servant through these natural events, through these little things. God was testing His servant by the gourd, the worm and the east wind.

Some little things may bring us exceeding joy and some little things may bring us distress and sorrow. By both, He is just testing us. Is our faith founded on the Rock? Can we still rejoice, do we learn in whatsoever state therewith to be content? That is a great lesson in God's School that He taught Paul and He was trying to teach Jonah, and He wishes to teach each one of us also.

“Should not I spare Nineveh?”

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. Then said the Lord, Thou haſt had pity on the gourd, for the which thou haſt not laboured, neither madeſt it grow; which came up in a night, and perished in a night: And should not I spare Nineveh?” Oh, this shows God's great heart! God had been showing Jonah His heart; God had been showing Jonah how shallow was his heart, how little he cared, how little he was in sympathy with God. And now God shows His own great heart. “Should not I spare Nineveh that great city, wherein are more than six score thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle?” There were one hundred and twenty thousand babies and God

says He will spare Nineveh for the babies. I think that is a very deep lesson for us. I believe there are many homes that have been spared and blessed because there are babies there. God spared Nineveh for the babies. The babies, as it were, sent up a mute appeal. As God looked down upon Nineveh He saw the babies and the babies sent up a mute appeal to God. One hundred and twenty thousand babies ! That was enough for God. Ten righteous men would have saved Sodom, but these babies were more than He could resist, and for these babies He will spare Nineveh.

Babies and Cattle

What a sacred thing a baby is ! How it ought to move our hearts also. And not only the babies, but the cattle made their appeal to God too. He thinks about the cattle in mercy and in grace. Nineveh was rebelling against God until now ; Nineveh was deeply wicked and licentious and corrupt, but there were all these innocent dumb cattle there, and God thinks of them. The dumb cattle were sending up a mute appeal to God and God will spare Nineveh because of the six score thousand persons that cannot discern between the right hand and the left hand, and the much cattle.

Jonah's mouth stopped

And so God deals with His servant. He argues with him. Jonah has kept up a controversy with God. Jonah says, "I do well to be angry." But God patiently deals with His servant. God patiently argues with him, patiently speaks to him, and shows him the unreasonableness of his position and the reasonableness of God's position. I believe that that stopped the controversy. Jonah had got nothing else to say and he yielded to God. He would never have shown up what a sinner he was, unless at last he yielded to God, and wanted to show forth God's mercy and grace and tenderness in his dealing with Him.

So let us take care when God has a controversy with us ; let us take care that we do receive His instructions and yield to Him and go His way. Let us learn in these last two chapters especially, the value of undying souls. We may think much of material benefits as Jonah did, but let us put first the value of undying souls and see God's mind concerning them and how we can help them.

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