

Jonah

Devotional Studies on Living Obediently

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Dedicated

to

Mr. and Mrs. George Gay
of the

Latin America Mission

and

Mr. and Mrs. Harold Berk
of the

Missionary Aviation Fellowship

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THE INTRODUCTION

THOUGH NUMBERED AMONG THE PROPHETS, the book of Jonah is more of a narrative than a prophecy. In fact, the only self-evident prophetic utterance in its four brief chapters is found in the form of a warning to the capital of Assyria—"Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown" (Jonah 3:4).

Jonah abounds with interest, offering a continuous chain of surprises and providences from beginning to end. Numerous intervening events and details are readily skipped over, while only the facts that provide vital moral and spiritual instruction are retained. Unquestionably, the pinnacle truth the Holy Spirit would have us receive from the book is the importance of living obediently, claiming victory over self-will and carnality.

For centuries, the critics have argued against the authenticity of this book. This has never been a problem with me, for several reasons. First, there is nothing in the book of Jonah that would suggest that its contents are not historic. Then, too, Jewish tradition has always accepted it as historic. The same was true of the profound Bible scholars of the early Church, as well as the fearless leaders of the Reformation.

The most conclusive reason, in my thinking, is found in our Lord's reply to the scribes and Pharisees

following their request for a sign: “He answered and said unto them, An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas: For 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” (Matthew 12:39-40). In this and the parallel passages, our Lord raised no question whatever as to the historicity of Jonah. On the contrary, what He said seems to have removed the possibility for doubt. Thus, Jonah is more than a stirring drama or a religious parable; it is the historic truth of God to be studied and heeded.

The book of Jonah has long been recognized for its missionary emphasis and challenge. The reader will readily see Jonah as the missionary who sought to evade his mission. In chapter 1, he is the disinterested missionary; in chapter 2, the disturbed missionary; in chapter 3, the disciplined missionary; and in chapter 4, the discouraged missionary.

Chapter 1

THE DESIGNATION

“Now the word of the Lord came unto Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before Me” (Jonah 1:1-2).

JONAH OPENS with the word “now,” literally “and,” a conjunction used by the Holy Spirit to signify that this book is to be joined with the others of the sacred Scriptures. Numerous Old Testament books begin in the same way, such as Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, the Books of Samuel and Kings, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, and Ezekiel. Thus we are assured from the first word in the book that this is one of the prophecies of which the Apostle Peter spoke which “came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost” (2 Peter 1:21).

Though not stated in the book, it would seem that Jonah is the author. It is well for us to note that he, like other writers of the inspired Word, freely tells us of his faults, which suggests the divine nature of the Book. Who of us would want to record his faults to be known by millions of readers in the ages to come, were he not directed and guided by the Holy Spirit?

Jonah is mentioned in only one other Old Testament passage, 2 Kings 14:25. From this verse we learn that he was born at Gath-hepher, a small town a little over an hour’s journey north of Nazareth. We also see from 2 Kings that Jonah prophesied during the reign of Jeroboam II, somewhere around the year of 800 B. C.

The prophet Jonah was “the son of Amittai.” Amittai is the Hebrew word for “truth.” It is interesting to note that the Cod-called prophet was a son of truth. Such could not be the result of chance. Rather it is a clear-cut evidence of the sovereignty of God in the choosing of His servant, even before birth. The same was true of Jeremiah. In the first chapter of his prophecy we read, “Then the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations” (Jeremiah 1:4-5). Jeremiah realized that prior to his birth he had been called of God to be a prophet. Not only was this true of Jonah and Jeremiah but of all whom the Lord has called to be His servants.

It is also interesting to note that Jonah is the Hebrew word for “dove.” Those who serve the Lord are to be as “wise as serpents, and harmless as doves” (Matthew 10: 16). Not only is the servant of God to be harmless as a dove, but he is to mourn as a dove. To be effective for God, he must be motivated by a sincere heart burden to

reach the lost for Christ. The Psalmist said, "He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him" (Psalm 126:6). Though there are many serving the Lord in our day, few seem to be going forth with weeping.

When Jesus stood overlooking the city of Jerusalem, He wept. When have you last wept with a loving concern to win the lost to Christ? Not many Christians have this burden for the unsaved. How we need to pray that God will give us a burning compassion that will constrain us to tell others about the Lord.

One time it was necessary for Dr. P. W. Philpott to change trains in a certain city on his way to a speaking engagement. Having several hours' layover before boarding his next train, he tried to telephone a dear friend, a Christian businessman, who for many years had been a faithful servant of the Lord. Doctor Philpott was surprised to learn from the man's wife that her husband was in the hospital, having recently undergone surgery. As quickly as possible, Doctor Philpott made his way to the hospital. Arriving at the room, he opened the door to enter; but as he did, he stopped suddenly, for he saw a most impressive sight. Kneeling beside the bed was a young nurse. The aged Christian businessman was praying aloud with his arm extended and his hand resting upon the nurse's head. Quietly Doctor Philpott shut the door, stepped out into the corridor and bowed his head. In a few minutes, the nurse came out. With a pleasant smile, as she wiped the tears from her eyes, she asked, "Do you wish to see Mr. Brown?"

"Yes, I do," replied Doctor Philpott. "He is a great man," said the young lady. "I am the third nurse he has led to Christ today."

Here was a man with a burden for souls, with a heart overflowing with the compassion of God. How God's people need this loving concern for those who are without Christ and without hope.

We read that "the word of the Lord came unto Jonah." Doubtless God spoke to His servant in a peculiar and special manner. But has it ever occurred to you that He, who spoke to Jonah and the prophets in times past, continues to speak to us through the ministry of the Holy Spirit? The Lord comes to us as definitely and speaks to us as clearly as He spoke to the prophets of old.

I have found that frequently God speaks through His Word. As I give the first moments of each day to prayer and meditation, God speaks to my heart. There have been a few occasions, while traveling, when I found it necessary to leave very early in the morning and I chose to meet God later in the day. But I soon realized that I missed something. Because I failed to take time first to wait on the Lord, I did not hear His voice.

It may be that God has been trying to speak to you, but you have been neglecting the Book through which He speaks. Possibly it is for this reason that you are confused and perplexed. Do you want wisdom for guidance? The Bible is a sure place to get it: "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him" (James 1:5). God gives wisdom through His Word. But if we are too busy to spend time with the open Bible, we shall miss the message God has for us.

One morning someone telephoned me requesting some information which I had upstairs in my study. Going up to my study, I lifted the receiver on the extension telephone and gave my friend the information he desired. I worked at my desk for several hours, and then returning downstairs, I noticed the telephone receiver was still off the hook. I hung it up and the telephone rang almost immediately. As I answered it, another friend said, "My, you certainly must be busy on the telephone. I have been trying to reach you for two hours." This friend had something important he wanted to tell me, but every time he dialed our number he received the busy signal.

How many times God has tried to reach us with some important message, but there was no answer. We were so busy with secondary things that we had no time to wait on Him. Thus, we missed receiving His guidance and direction, only to be left in our own bewilderment.

What was “the word of the Lord” that came to Jonah? “Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before Me” (verse 2). Nineveh was the beautiful and prosperous capital city of Assyria. It was “great” in its size, in the number of its inhabitants, in its wealth, and in its power. But like most large cities in our day, it was also “great” in its wickedness. In its splendor it was probably more magnificent than Babylon, but in its sinfulness it was possibly even more wicked than Sodom.

God said to Jonah, regarding the people of Nineveh, “For their wickedness is come up before me.” That is, their wickedness had reached a high degree, or the highest pitch. It was full to the brim. Thus, as far as Nineveh was concerned, it was either a case of immediate repentance or coming judgment. Our God is a God of love; but examples both in the Bible and in history reveal that when nations continually resist the grace and mercy of God, judgment is the result.

One cannot help realizing that in the light of the swift-moving events of our day, at this very moment our country is in the place of either repentance or judgment. Surely God would hear immediately if the people of our land would turn to Him in humble repentance, acknowledging His Son as Lord of all. On the other hand, He says in Genesis 6:3, “My spirit shall not always strive with man.” God has showered us with His goodness throughout our years of comfort and ease. But rather than fall upon our faces in humble gratitude for His goodness, we have turned to every kind of abominable pursuit, ignoring the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

Gibbon gives five reasons for the fall of Rome: the rapid increase of divorce, higher and higher taxes, the craze for pleasure, the building of gigantic armaments, and the decay of religion. There can be no question about it, our country is traveling the same road. Is there any hope for us? I am certain that there is. What is it? It will be found in only one way: by repenting and humbling ourselves before the Lord! God says in 2 Chronicles 7: 14: “If My people, which are called by My name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.” God is ready to meet us as a nation, but we must turn to Him in repentance.

The Lord called Jonah to cry out against the wickedness of Nineveh. This was not an easy task. To speak boldly against sin, one must have victory over sin in his own heart and life. This is one reason so few Christians are launching a battle against sin in our day. They are so in love with sin and so mastered by it that they cannot attack sin. Jonah was called to be a protestant. He was to raise a protest against sin. Many who call themselves Protestants never protest against anything. They do not protest outwardly because they have never really protested inwardly. They are still controlled by their sins. God declares in 1 John 2: 1, “These things write I unto you, that ye sin not,” literally “stop sinning.” We are to launch a protest against sin in our own personal lives, claiming a complete victory through Jesus Christ our victorious Lord.

In the early days of the Keswick Convention, a clergyman got up and said, “I want to be conformed to Christ and the will of God, but I have a habit, an enslaving habit. I want to give it up but I cannot. It would kill me. What shall I do?”

“Die!” replied the chairman, adding, “It is not necessary that anyone should live, but it is necessary that any and every man should put away anything whatever that hinders his fellowship with God.”

The important task to which Jonah was called demanded immediate action. The words arise and go could also be translated “get up and go.” How these words need to be sounded in our churches today! Get up and go! We need to arise from our slumber and drowsiness and go into every part of the world with the only message that can liberate from sin and corruption. Like Jonah, we must sound an alarm. Time is short. The gospel message is not to be whispered in a corner, but shouted aloud on the housetops. Nineteen hundred years ago, the Church was commissioned to go “into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16: 15). As yet, the task is far from completion. We still have not done what the Lord commissioned us to do. Approximately one thousand

tribes have no missionary. There are at least seventeen hundred languages without a single word of Scripture.

God is saying to our youth, "Get up and go!" Soon it will be too late. Young people need to listen to God's voice now. Rather than respond to the Lord's voice, how frequently we hear young people say, "I do not feel called." Yet they usually get married, settle down in a comfortable home, and begin pouring out their lives to make more dollars so they can buy more comforts. Let me ask, did they "feel called" to do this? In most cases, the problem is either that they were not within calling distance or that they refused to listen; for nineteen hundred years God has been calling Christians to evangelize the world.

This call is not only for youth; older people as well are called to "get up and go." You may be too old to go to a mission field, but you can use your money to make it Possible for some younger person to go.

It was during our annual missionary conference in a church I served that God spoke to the heart of one of our men in a very special way about sacrificing for missions. When he came to see me, he was practically in tears as he told how the Lord had shown him that he had done so little, and that he must from now on do all he possibly could to reach the lost for Christ. Although he was a family man almost fifty, he felt there was no answer but to go to the mission field himself and begin to serve the Lord. He was a truck driver and drove a transport truck between two large mid-western cities. Several nights later, while driving his truck along the highway, the burden of missions came upon him so heavily that he pulled over to the side of the road; bowing his head he prayed, "Lord, I am willing to go. I give myself to You completely. If You want me to go to the mission field, I will go. If You want me to send someone, I will work to get the money." Over the course of the next few months, God made it clear to him that he was not to go to the field. But this earnest believer never deviated from his commitment to the Lord. From that night he has been doing his best to send substitutes with his money.

I am convinced that, if a Christian family cannot go to the mission field, it should do its best to send a substitute. We should look for a missionary to send, and keep him out on the field by our prayers and our giving. Suppose every Christian family at home had done this for the past nineteen hundred years. Would the world have been reached? There seems to be no question about it.

Day by day, under the guidance of the Lord, we who are parents ought to train our children in the things of God, that they might come to know Him in their early years and then go forth to serve Him in their youth. If more Christian parents had done this during the past twenty-five years, perhaps the world would not be on the verge of a horrible nuclear war today.

Do we think that such a war can be averted by peace talks, disarmament conferences, or by the United Nations? What is at the heart of all warfare? James gives us the answer: "From whence come wars and fightings among you? Come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members?" (James 4: 1) Lust is at the root of all warfare. Only Christ can deal with lust. Thus, we who know Him must "get up and go," crying aloud the message of salvation, that lost and dying millions might hear of Christ and His love and come to know Him by believing on Him.

Maybe you are bound by lust. Have you ever come to Jesus Christ? Have you acknowledged Him as your Savior and Lord? Oh, do so now! There is no escape from your sin other than that which God has provided in the person of the Lord Jesus. Believe on Him now while there is still time.

Chapter 2

THE DEVIATION

“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” (Jonah 1:3).

GOD’S designation for Jonah was revealed in clear, understandable terms. He was to “get up and go” to the great and flourishing Assyrian capital and warn the inhabitants of the eminency of God’s judgment for their sins. Failing to respond to the Word of the Lord, the prophet forsook his obligation and hastened off in the opposite direction from Nineveh. Thus, we see his deviation from the glorious plan and purpose of God. He was told to “go to Nineveh,” but he “rose up to flee unto Tarshish.” There are at least three reasons for Jonah’s action: he was selfish, he was patriotic, and he was disturbed.

When the divine call came to Jonah, he undoubtedly pondered on his former experiences with the Ninevites. Having been reared in a town that bordered on their country, he knew them well, for he had witnessed their cruelty and brutality from childhood. The Ninevites were well known for their savagery in plundering cities, where they burned boys and girls alive and tortured adults, tearing the skin from their bodies and leaving them to die in the scorching sun. The name of Nineveh stood for every possible kind of cold-blooded barbarity.

Unless God’s prophet were walking in close harmony and fellowship with the Lord, it is understandable why he might flee in the opposite direction. What was Jonah’s tragic mistake? He looked to himself rather than to God. Because he looked to his frail self, he was overcome by fear. Had Jonah depended fully on the Lord, he would have realized the truth of Psalm 34:15, “The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and His ears are open unto their cry.” Had he trusted his Lord who had called him, Jonah could have gone to Nineveh with perfect confidence that God’s grace would be sufficient.

The only reason any of us fear doing God’s will is that we, like Jonah, walk in open rebellion to the Word of the Lord, and look to ourselves rather than to God. Every believer is plagued constantly by the enemy of self. It is for this reason that we should frequently do as God has said in James 4: 10, “Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord.” The life emptied of self is the only kind of life that can be filled with God. D. L. Moody said, “Christ sends none away empty but those who are full of themselves.” It is obvious that Jonah failed to claim victory over the self-life or he would never have headed for Tarshish.

Like Jonah, many believers in our day are sadly defeated by the self-life. It has been wisely said that the man who is self-centered is off-centered. In Philippians 2:4 we read, “Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.” Why does the world still lie in darkness with millions yet to hear of the deliverance that is ours through Jesus Christ? Because we are looking on our own things and not on the things of others. Why is the Church of Jesus Christ weak, powerless, and impotent before the forces of evil? Because we are looking on our own things and not on the things of others. Why are we beset with anger, malice, envy, and jealousy? Why have we lost the joy of the Lord? Why is our faith so weak? Because we are looking on our own things and not on the things of others.

Oh, child of God, let the Lord Jesus have the mastery of your life. Let Him break you of self. “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise” (Psalm 51:17). God uses most for His glory those people whose wills are broken. The sacrifices He accepts are those that have been broken in humble contrition before Him. It was the breaking down of Jacob’s natural strength at Peniel that got him where God could clothe him with spiritual power. It was the breaking of the rock at Horeb by Moses that let out the cool waters to the thirsty people. It was when Gideon’s soldiers broke their pitchers that the hidden light

shone forth. It was when Mary broke her beautiful alabaster box that the pent-up perfume filled the house.

The self-life was not the only reason for Jonah's actions. For many centuries the Ninevites had been the despised enemies of Jonah's own people, the Jews. On many occasions the Assyrians had poured out their fury and wrath on the Jewish people, and the most comforting hope that flowered in the hearts of the people of God was that some day the Lord would pour out His wrath on these scorned enemies. On the other hand, Jonah knew and understood the power of God's love. He was afraid that, if he went to the Ninevites as God had said, in all probability they would repent; punishment for their gross and extreme wickedness would be averted. Jonah was a Hebrew first and a prophet second. He was a loyal Israelite, but a traitor to God; patriotic in the eyes of the Jews, but unfaithful in the sight of God. What a tragedy! Can we not see hatred, one of the fruits of the self-life, at work in Jonah?

However, we must not be too hard on the prophet. Let us take an inward look into our own hearts. Are there any traces of hatred there? Do we have any enemies? Jesus said, "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you" (Matthew 5:44). Do you always do this? If not, you are no better than Jonah. You, too, are disobedient and rebellious. Would you glory in the day that God might shower judgment upon your enemies? If so, you and Jonah are running in the same direction. Possibly, like Jonah, you could give some good reasons for your actions. "If only you knew what they have done to me," you say, "if only you could have seen their abuse, dishonesty, and unkindness." Such an argument is convincing. But listen to what God says in Matthew 6:14-15: "For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." Jonah's argument sounded good to a devoted Hebrew and a zealous patriot, but in the eyes of God it was empty and shallow because it stemmed from the seeds of hatred.

Dr. F. W. Boreham used to tell of visiting an old man on his deathbed. He was a man whom nobody liked—hard, sullen, and dour. He spoke to no one and made it perfectly plain that he wished no one to speak to him. In his youth a companion had done him a grievous injury.

"I'll remember it," he had hissed, "I'll remember it to my dying day." And he did. When his dying day actually came, he realized that the rankling memory of that youthful wrong had soured and darkened his whole life.

"I've gone over it every morning," he moaned, "and I've thought of it every night. I've cursed him a hundred times each day. I see now that my curses have eaten into my soul. My hate has hurt nobody but myself. God knows it turned my life into hell." It is true; hatred has never helped anyone. It can only produce injury and distress to those who are afflicted with this horrible disease.

The third reason why Jonah fled to Tarshish was that he was disturbed. The prophet had to go somewhere. He could not sit still. Either he had to rush off to Nineveh or flee in some other direction. Whenever the word of God comes to a soul, it disturbs that soul until there is a response. "The word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart" (Hebrews 4:12). God's Word penetrates man's entire being: piercing, cutting, uprooting. It brings us face to face with God. No man is ever the same after the Word of the Lord comes upon him. The Bible is the avowed enemy of the status quo. Something must happen. It always does. Either we respond to the voice of God, to do His blessed and holy will, or we turn from Him to go in the way of the flesh. God told Jonah to "get up and go." The prophet responded immediately, but he went in the wrong direction. What a tragedy!

On one occasion the Lord Jesus had been speaking to a group of His followers. The word He delivered to

them provoked action. What was the result when He finished? The Apostle John tells us that “from that time many of His disciples went back, and walked no more with Him” (John 6:66). These disciples had heard the Word of the Lord. It disturbed them to the extent that they were compelled to act upon it; but their action was against it. Are there not many disciples like these in our day? They know what God’s Word teaches. They understand God’s plan. But being carnal, un-yielded to the control of the Holy Spirit, they flaunt the human will in the face of God. Small wonder that they are strangers to the joy of the Lord.

Jonah’s headlong flight was not only to Tarshish, but also “from the presence of the Lord.” When a man refuses to do what God wants him to do, not only does he fail the Lord, but he turns against the Lord. He breaks off fellow-ship with God. Taking his life in his own hands, he attempts to improve upon God’s plan.

We are not told that Jonah was successful in fleeing from the presence of the Lord. He merely attempted to hide from God. How ridiculous it would be for any of us to think that we could ever escape from the presence of Him who created us. Many have sought to do this, but no one has ever been successful. Adam and Eve had listened to the Word of God. In clear detail they were told how they should obey and follow the Lord. Like Jonah, they refused to obey God; and after they had sinned, what is the first thing we are told they did? “Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God amongst the trees of the garden” (Genesis 3:8). They did not actually hide; they only thought they were hiding.

The same was true of Cain. After his deliberate rebellion against God, we read in Genesis 4: 16, “And Cain went out from the presence of the Lord, and dwelt in the land of Nod, on the east of Eden.”

Others have sought to get away from God rather than obey Him, but no one has ever been successful, nor will anyone ever be successful in escaping from Him. David reminds us of this fact in Psalm 139:7-10: ‘Whither shall I go from Thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from Thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, Thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, Thou art there. 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.’”

In Jeremiah 23:24 God asks, “Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him? . . . Do not I fill heaven and earth?” Let no one think he can get away from his sin and God’s will by a change of locality. Sin is not a matter of locality; it is a matter of the heart. If God has spoken to us, regardless of the purpose, and we have failed to respond to His voice, we could sail the seven seas only to become more miserable mile by mile the farther we went. Ask David about this. He will tell you. Hear the cry of his sorrowful heart, “For day and night Thy hand was heavy upon me” (Psalm 32:4); “My sin is ever before me” (Psalm 51:3). David found no peace until he repented and surrendered himself to God’s control. Until we are willing to turn from our sin and to yield ourselves to God, we are living in disobedience; and we may be sure disobedience produces only misery.

Determined to achieve in his wicked way, Jonah gathered his few belongings together and hastily left the mountains of his native country in the region of Lebanon to hurry down to the seaport town of Joppa. Everything seemed to be working splendidly: as soon as he arrived, there was a ship with room for a passenger, ready to go to a far distant point to the west, away from Nineveh. Could anything have been better planned? No visas, no passports, no waiting, no problems, nothing—just simply get on the boat and go. The whole setting was ideal. What does this prove? There was a mind behind it all. More than that, a master mind. When a man professes to know God and he is seeking to get away from God, this master mind will help in every possible way.

We read in other portions of Jonah that God prepared a great fish to swallow Jonah and that He also prepared a gourd to protect Jonah from the scorching noonday sun. But we may be sure that God did not plan this ship for Jonah; the devil did that. It is amazing how skilled the devil is in manipulating situations and incidents in the progressive stages of sin. Very often Christians miss the will of God completely because they are unaware of the fact that the devil can make things dovetail almost as attractively as God, at least at the inception of their

downfall. This is a trap the wicked one has used repeatedly to ensnare the people of God. If we pray the matter through and really seek God's will, there will never be any mistake about discerning between God's plan and the devil's plan.

The devil's plan always has a loophole of some kind whereby we can readily recognize it as a counterfeit. What was the loophole in the devil's plan as far as Jonah was concerned? The ship was going in the wrong direction. In practically every detail it appeared similar to God's provision in undertaking for every need. But the Lord told Jonah to go to Nineveh, and the ship was going to Tarshish. That was the loophole.

A young lady approached me about her marriage plans. She was a child of God and, as far as I knew, she was walking in fellowship with the Lord. Her boyfriend gave every appearance of being a splendid, energetic, congenial sort of fellow who would probably make a wonderful husband. He had a keen mind and was well educated. I felt quite confident that this young man would be successful in life. It appeared to be a perfect match, but there was one loophole. The young fellow could not believe that Jesus is the Son of God. Though morally clean and possessed of high standards, he refused to receive Christ for salvation. I tried to point out to the young lady the evils of such a marriage.

"But," she said, "after we are married I am sure he will understand and believe." She further said, "Because of the way the Lord has directed in every detail, I am convinced that this is His will for me." She failed to recognize the loophole. This was not God's plan, for there are no loop-holes in His divine will. This was the devil's plan, for it was contrary to the teaching of the Scriptures. God's way is always clear, without any vagaries or questions. When it is the will of the Lord it will seem as though we hear His voice saying from every direction, "This is the way, walk ye in it" (Isaiah 30:21).

The ship being ready to set sail, Jonah "paid the fare thereof, and went down into it, to go with them unto Tarshish from the presence of the Lord." He "paid the fare" all right. In fact, the rest of the book makes clear how expensive this trip actually was. Notice, too, after he "paid the fare," he "went down." This is the price of disobedience. No one ever goes up while disobeying God. He always goes down. In the book of Jonah we see God's servant going down, down, farther and farther away from the blessing of the divine will. First, he went down to Joppa, down from the sweet, enjoyable highlands where he had learned to walk and talk with God. Next, he went down into the ship; and then later, as the result of his sin, down into the fish's belly; and finally down to the very bottom of the great deep. Here is a picture of the life out of the will of God: going down, down, and down. The key word of every life fleeing from God and His will is "down."

Which way are you headed at this moment? Are you walking with God, or seeking to escape the presence of God? Do not be foolish. There is only one way of blessing and happiness, and that is in the Lord's own chosen and divine will for your life. If you are not living in His will, you are not a spiritual child, but a spiritual rebel. Get right with Him! Claim His best! His forgiveness and love is available for the repentant heart.

Maybe you are rebellious because you have never really been born again. You may have joined church, but no church can transform the heart. It takes the power of God to do this. You need Christ. Will you receive Him into your life at this moment?

Chapter 3

THE DISRUPTION

“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. 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. 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” (Jonah 1:4-6).

GOD’S designation to Jonah was to go to the people of Nineveh and warn them of impending judgment. Instead of obeying God, the prophet turned from the divinely-chosen path in his attempt to flee “from the presence of the Lord,” thus the deviation. Disobedience is never without its misery. For this reason, it is only natural that the next step in this narrative should be the disruption: “But the Lord sent out a great wind unto the sea, and there was a mighty tempest in the sea, so that the ship was like to be broken.”

After being commissioned of the Lord, Jonah flaunted a “but” at God: “But Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish.” It is a serious offense to “but” God. Why? Simply because God will return the “but” in the form of chastisement. This is exactly what the Lord did to Jonah: “But the Lord sent out a great wind into the sea.”

In every generation there have been believers saying “but” to God: “The Lord called me to go to the mission field, but my parents would not let me go.” “God convinced me that I should go to Africa to serve Him, but I married a boy who was not interested.” “I had the burden to be a medical missionary, but I decided to stay home and use my money to support missionaries.” We have come to God with dozens of varieties of “huts.” Be sure, however, when He says “Go,” no “but” will be acceptable to Him. We must respond with immediate action. If we do not, then God will begin to “but.” His “buts” are disturbingly painful, usually resulting in suffering and sorrow.

At this very moment, you may be miserable and unhappy because sometime, somewhere, you said “but” to God. Now you are reaping the regretful consequences of your refusal to obey God. How we need to realize that disobedience cannot produce anything but disaster.

Several years ago I was speaking at a Christian camp in upper New York State. One night, close to twelve o’clock, we were awakened by a loud crash. At breakfast the next morning we learned that two teen-age boys were speeding in a new Ford, trying to see how fast it would go. The mountain road on which they were driving was full of curves, and when they came to a sharp turn which they could not make, due to excessive speed, the car left the highway, hitting five trees before it finally came to a stop. The two boys were pulled from the wreckage with little chance of living.

Later, my family and I went to a nearby gasoline station to see the remains of the car. Most of its parts had been thrown into the back end of a truck, while the chassis was battered beyond repair. All four wheels had been sheered off, as well as the gas tank and the springs.

The tragic part of the story is that, earlier on the evening of the crash, the son of the owner of the car went to his father and asked to use it. For some reason permission was refused. Later that evening, neighbors drove the boy’s parents to a nearby town to visit friends. The parents gone, and thinking they would not know, the son decided to take the car. He picked up a friend, and the tragic wreck was the result. Disobedience to parents is a serious matter. But even more serious is disobedience to God.

Jonah was in a dangerous predicament. He was resisting God’s holy plan for his life. How foolish that he thought he could run away from God. Only trouble awaits anyone who seeks to ignore the divine plan. All disobedience is followed by judgment, which results in misery and unhappiness. There was no escape; Jonah had to suffer for his rebellion.

Someone may ask, “Was it not unfair of God to be so harsh in His treatment of Jonah?” Not at all! God is

too loving and too merciful to let His servants drift into shame and sorrow. For this reason He sent chastisement that Jonah might come back to Him with a willingness to obey.

Usually after a disobedient child is chastened by the Lord, he forever praises God for the chastisement. This was true in David's experience: "Before I was afflicted I went astray: but now have I kept Thy word" (Psalm 119:67). Further he says, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted" (Psalm 119:71). He realized the value and importance of chastisement. Most of us do, after it is past; though while we are in the midst of it, we frequently wonder why God is permitting it. To be sure, we need chastening; the Lord knows when and how much we need, that we might better praise and honor Him in a life of willing obedience.

One of the pitiful results of the disobedient life is the effect it has on those around us. The innocent sailors on the ship had to suffer because of Jonah's sin. And not only those on Jonah's ship, doubtless there were other boats in the vicinity; all those people were caught in the disabling storm because one man refused to obey God. Paul says in Romans 14:7, "For none of us liveth to himself." How true! Wherever there is a believer failing to walk with God, with un-confessed sin in his life, unsaved men and women are being kept from the joy and blessing of the Lord because of what they have seen in an inconsistent life.

We get some idea of the fierceness of the storm from the fact that "the mariners were afraid." This was unusual, for these men were well-seasoned sailors. They had been through numerous storms before; but this one seemed to be more destructive than all the rest, so much so that each one began to cry aloud "unto his god."

It appears that each sailor had his own little god, his particular philosophy of religion. Like many in our day, they must have felt, "You go your way and I'll go mine, and we will all get there just the same." The religion of the sailors appeared to be an emergency religion. When things were going well they did not heed it, but when tossed by the storm, which seemed to be beyond their control, they immediately reached out for their god. Like most people, they were interested primarily in their work and making money. They were far more absorbed with dividends than deity. But the storm changed the situation, as it usually does. Be sure, however, that such a religion is valueless in time of storm.

Discovering the uselessness of their manmade religions, the sailors tried another approach. They "cast forth the wares that were in the ship into the sea." Their praying did not work, so they tried the "do-it-yourself" approach. Doubtless the ship was heavily laden with valuable merchandise. But there come times in life when even valuables are worthless. Especially is this true regarding salvation. Neither money, investments, nor real estate can provide salvation. Very often these things are definite hindrances to salvation. God says in Mark 8:36-37: "For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" There is only one way to be saved. That is not by trying to save oneself; it is by receiving Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, as Lord of the life.

Now where was Jonah during all this busy activity on the deck of the ship? "Jonah was gone down into the sides of the ship; and he lay, and was fast asleep." How do you account for the fact that Jonah could sleep through the storm while the rest of the men on board were so distraught? The answer is obvious to me: Jonah was doped. That's right—he was doped by the devil. He was running away from God, and when one runs away from God he puts himself, temporarily at least, in the hands of the devil. The devil always helps those who seek to escape the presence of the Lord. Every step of Jonah's trip thus far seems to have been prepared by the devil. No human could have worked out the circumstances so well. Thus, when God sends a terrible storm to chasten Jonah, the devil puts Jonah to sleep.

Satan has not changed his tactics in our day. In Hebrews 5:11 we read of those who are "dull of hearing." There are many believers who are dull of hearing. They are so far removed from a life of obedience that they cannot discern between the Lord's plan and the devil's; oftentimes they seem more willing to act upon the devil's

plan than God's. The devil has dulled their spiritual sensibilities.

Can it not also be said that the Church of Christ is "dull of hearing" today in its response to the voice of God relative to worldwide evangelization? How bored many of our church people are with anything that has to do with missionary endeavor. Speak to them about the social disorders of the day, which only the gospel can cure, and they are quite unconcerned. Tell them of the problems concerning our youth and how to win them to Christ, and still they are not moved. Like Jonah of old, they are sleeping in the midst of one of the worst storms that has ever struck the world. The Church's vital task is evangelization. Our time, money, and talents should be poured into our principal responsibility of reaching the lost for Christ.

Several years ago, the leaders of one of the largest denominations in our country issued the statement that "This year we are going to major in evangelism." This sounds about as ridiculous as if one of the commercial airlines were to declare that "This year we are going to major in transportation." Has not a basic obligation of the Church always been evangelism? Indeed it has, but we have been sleeping rather than working. God says in Romans 13:11-12, "And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light." To a drowsy, slumbering Church God says, "Awaken and reach the lost for Me."

Having tried several unsuccessful remedies, prayer to their pagan gods and flinging the cargo overboard, the captain now seeks out Jonah. Finding him, he says, "What meanest thou, O sleeper? arise, call upon thy God, if so be that God will think upon us, that we perish not." These words must have startled God's prophet, but evidently they did not shake him enough, for I see no evidence that Jonah called upon his God. He prayed later, but not here. Do you know why he did not pray? He could not. Jonah knew the Scriptures; he was well aware of the fact that, when living in disobedience to God, it is useless to pray. David had declared in Psalm 66:18, "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me." In the matter of prayer, Jonah was just as well off sleeping, because in his present condition praying would have been a waste of time.

We might well wonder if praying is any more than this for many in our day. The Lord promises in Matthew 21:22, "And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive." Here is a generous promise from the Lord, but few of God's people seem to know its reality. Frequently, praying seems ineffective. There are many words but few answers simply because those who pray are not right with God. The Bible makes it clear that "the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much" (James 5:16). If one is in a right relationship with the Lord, he is on praying ground. The result will be miraculous answers to prayer.

When Evangelist Tom Rees was holding a series of meetings in South London, a lady came up to him one evening before the meeting and asked, "Do you know why I've come tonight?"

"No," replied Mr. Rees, "why?"

"I came to see an answer to my prayer," she said.

"I don't think I understand you," was his puzzled answer. The lady smiled and then said: "Some years ago my son was at a camp where your brother Richard was in command. Your brother asked Jim to join him in prayer for his brother Tom and to continue to pray until God had answered. Jim came home and told me and I, too, began to pray daily that Tom Rees might come to know Christ. Later I learned of his conversion and then that he was preaching the gospel. So today when I was told who it was that would speak here tonight, I came to see an answer to prayer."

God longs to answer prayer. He desires to show us how He can do the seemingly impossible. But so few of His people are in a position to pray because they are disobedient to His holy call. I am convinced that God wants us to pray that the lost will come to Him and be saved. He says in Psalm 2:8, "Ask of Me, and I shall give

thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession.” Too few of us take the time to pray for the unsaved, and most of us are not in a position to experience mighty prayer power.

Could it be that we are like Jonah of old, sleeping when we should be praying and working? In Amos 6:1 God says, “Woe to them that are at ease in Zion.” Are we living selfishly for the things of this world when we should be living out-and-out for Jesus Christ? Oh, Christian, time is so short. God says in Ephesians 5: 16, “Redeeming the time, because the days are evil.” May we let our time count for Christ. How can we best do this? By yielding our all to His control. Do not resist Him in any way. Claim the fullness of His power through the Holy Spirit.

John Woolman, the son of a poor Quaker farmer, as a lad of seven years sat alone beside a New Jersey roadway, reading these words: “And he shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God” (Revelation 22:1). They moved him as only a child can be moved. From that day on, whether as a schoolboy or the tailor which he later became, the thought persistently filled his mind, “God, make me a conduit through which this water of life can pass to men everywhere.” The Lord heard John Woolman’s prayer and used him in a mighty way to point others to Christ.

How we need to pray that the Lord will make us conduits, channels through which the water of life will be able to pass into other lives. May God help each of us to so examine our hearts before Him that, if there is a spiritual need of any kind, at this very moment we shall let the Lord have full possession.

Possibly you are not sure of your salvation, of whether or not you are truly a child of God. You need not doubt, for the Bible is clear. God says in John 5:24, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth My word, and believeth on Him that sent Me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life.” Believe on Christ! Tell Him at this moment that you are willing to receive Him as your Saviour and Lord. Then you will be assured from God’s Word that you have “everlasting life” and that you are forever delivered from “condemnation.”

Chapter 4

THE DETECTION

“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. 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? And he said unto them, I am an Hebrew; and I fear the Lord, the God of heaven, which hath made the sea and the dry land. 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” (Jonah 1:7-10).

THE DISOBEDIENCE to the heavenly call resulted in the disruption, the severe storm which frightened everyone on the ship with the exception of Jonah who slept calmly, totally oblivious to the surrounding circumstances. With great fear, the disturbed sailors cried to their favorite gods for help. Finding no relief from the angry elements, they proceeded to throw the ship’s cargo into the sea. When this likewise proved futile, they said to one another,

“Come, and let us cast lots, that we may know for whose cause this evil is upon us.” This suggests that these men were aware of several divine principles, even though they were not believers. They knew that sin results in judgment and that one’s personal sin affects others. Thus they were determined to get to the root of the trouble.

Gathering together, “they cast lots, and the lot fell upon Jonah.” The culprit was discovered. Though the prophet sought to flee from the presence of the Lord, the inevitable detection had to come. It always does. One may hide his sin for a while, but usually, sooner or later, the light of God’s truth reveals the darkness of sin. The Bible declares in Numbers 32:23, “Be sure your sin will find you out.” Here is an inexorable law of the Scriptures that must not be overlooked.

Explorer Frank H. Shaw records a true story in a magazine article about two men who had traveled far into the Arctic in search of seals. Through the long months of isolation they quarreled, and came to hate each other with a deep bitterness. At last one man fired a slug into the other’s brain. To cover his crime, he dropped the body in a lonely glacial crevasse. Then he returned to civilization and explained sadly that his friend had died of exposure.

But fate devised a plot too unbelievable even for fiction. The glacier slowly crawled toward the sea until at last the section enclosing the body broke loose and became an iceberg. The Ice Patrol sighted the iceberg and decided to dynamite it because it was a menace to shipping. When they clambered on it to prepare it for the dynamiting, they saw, sealed in the clear ice, the body of a man. It was perfectly preserved. A further examination revealed the bullet hole and the marks of identification on the body, providing a sufficient record of the crime on which any jury would convict.

Sooner or later, in time or eternity, every man will be confronted by the evidence of his sins—unless they are under the blood of Christ. Thank God, there is forgiveness if there is true repentance and sincere faith. God has declared, “Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man [Christ Jesus] is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: And by Him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses” (Acts 13:38~39).

Sin always finds its victim—spiritually, physically, and mentally. Board whatever ship you may, going to Tarshish or any other place; participate in any scheme the devil might devise; try anything else you would like: God’s Word is still true, “Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in His sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do” (Hebrews 4:13). God sees everything, and even though we may escape the eye of men, we are not shielded from the presence of God. Two persons know about every sin that is ever committed—the one who commits the sin, and God. It is impossible to hide. There is only one thing to do—confess. God will forgive on the grounds of our confession to Him. “He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy” (Proverbs 28:13).

Having detected Jonah as the guilty one, the mariners bombarded him with questions: “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?” They inquired about his occupation, doubtless suspecting that he was a diviner or a sorcerer, and had brought the storm upon them through his enchantment.

But what was Jonah’s occupation? He was supposed to be a prophet for God, but in his present circumstances he was a fugitive from God because he was fleeing from the will of the Lord. What a miserable place for anyone to be. And yet is it not true that there are scores naming the name of Jesus Christ who are fugitives from God’s will? In Numbers 11:29 Moses said, “Would God that all the Lord’s people were prophets, and that the Lord would put His spirit upon them.” All believers are called to be prophets for God, but many are fugitives from God.

What marks the difference between the prophet of God and the fugitive from God? There is a very distinct

difference. A young lady had been converted, and a very close girl friend noticed the tremendous change that came over the new Christian. Not having been converted herself, she could not explain it. So she asked her dear friend, "What is it that makes you so different from what you used to be?" "Christ makes me different," she replied. "Whereas I used to love the world, I now love the Word." Only one letter of the alphabet made the difference, but what a contrast!

The world or the Word determines the occupation. What is your occupation? You say you are a believer in Jesus Christ. Are you a prophet of God? Then you will love His Word and desire to obey His Word. If you are a fugitive from God, your interest and concern will be in the world and the things of the world. You will desire to please the flesh and live for "things" rather than to please the Lord. The world or the Word—which is it? Your answer may determine whether you are a fugitive or a prophet.

In Psalm 137:4 we read a most heart-searching question, "How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?" There are many Christians who say they are believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, yet they spend most of their time in the devil's pursuits and waste much of God's money on the devil's pleasures. Indeed, the world should be a strange land for the believer. Those who try to cling to Christ and the world will have no song in their hearts. They will know little of the joy of the Lord. God says in 1 Corinthians 10:21 that "Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of devils: ye cannot be partakers of the Lord's table, and of the table of devils." Many by their disobedience are ignoring this verse, but they have no testimony for the Lord,

God's people are to be a separated people. We are called to be His prophets in the midst of an adulterous and sinful generation. Ours is a high and noble calling. "Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness into His marvelous light" (1 Peter 2:9). How few Christians are really living out-and-out for the Lord Jesus in these days. Their manner of life proves conclusively that they are not prophets of God.

In a most revealing newspaper article, a converted gambler touched on some of the causes for the evils of our country. Before his conversion, this gambler was the proprietor of thirty-six gambling houses in New York City. This is what he says: "The fault doesn't lie with the underworld. The underworld is the result. The fault lies with the homes—in fact, the home life of some church members. That is where recruits for the city's hellholes are prepared. During the twenty years I was in the gambling racket I found that about all the men and women who filled my houses and bet themselves to ruin were the products of the homes where card-playing was encouraged. It is across the friendly poker table or in the bridge game that Satan turns his fiery brand on the young men and women of America. It is in many so-called Christian homes that the gambling fever begins. The underworld is not trying to drag innocents down; it does not have to. The homes are turning out more recruits than the underworld can possibly handle. They cannot be chased back with an ax. They have been given their education by their parents. They have received their worldly wisdom at the dances, card parties, and other social diversions which feature modern social life. There is nothing in the underworld that can furnish them any surprises."

Anyone familiar with the low standards practiced in many Christian homes today could not for a moment refute what this converted gambler has written. It is the absolute truth. Like Jonah of old, many have named the name of the Lord but they are selfish, disobedient, and sinful. But God reminds us in His Word in Galatians 6:7-8, "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting." Jonah's sin found the prophet out. Your sin will find you out unless you come clean before God, confessing your rebellion and submitting to His control.

Jonah tells the determined mariners that he is a Hebrew and that he fears "the Lord, the God of heaven, which hath made the sea and the dry land." Strictly speaking, he was an Israelite; but among the Gentiles, Israelites

liked to call themselves Hebrews. Jonah must have been terribly embarrassed as he said, "I fear the Lord." Certainly his practice belied his profession, for he gave no evidence to the sailors that he feared God. Mere lip service is not enough. To fear God is to respect God; to respect Him is to obey Him. In the language of our Lord, Jonah was a hypocrite. Jesus said in Matthew 15:8, "This people draweth nigh unto Me with their mouth, and honoureth Me with their lips; but their heart is far from Me."

Hypocrisy is one of the most serious evils of the Church today. "Saying" without "doing" is blatant hypocrisy. Many profess to fear God, but their works deny their words. They sing the hymns and offer prayers with pious devotion, while at the same time they are deceitful and dishonest. Is it any wonder that the Church is helplessly defeated and powerless in our day? Hypocrisy is the great curse in the lives of many who characterize the scribes and Pharisees to whom Jesus spoke, "Ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness" (Matthew 23:27).

A missionary, who is the headmaster of a high school for boys in India, found that two of his pupils had cheated by copying their essays from a book. The next morning at chapel he said to his assembled classes, "I am going to show you a hypocrite." Then he held up a small beam from the roof of a house. It was about three inches square and six feet long. Three sides were perfect, but when he turned it over, the fourth side, which had been holding up the roof, was seen. It was hollow. White ants, the terrible pests in India, had tunneled their way through until all of the inside was eaten away. They had left just the outside surface so that the beams still looked strong and smooth. After holding up the hollow beam the missionary likened it to a hypocrite, then he said, "I have found not only an 'it' hypocrite in this school but also two 'he' hypocrites." He picked up the two essays, read a paragraph from each and then the same paragraph from the book from which they had been copied. He then called out the names of the two boys saying, "Come up here and face the class." Not a sound was heard as the guilty boys obeyed. Then the principal took the beam and banged it over the desk. It broke very easily because it was so thin and weak. Giving a piece to each of the boys, he told them to carry their "hypocrite" with them to their classes. It was to be laid on the desk as a reminder.

The two ant-eaten pieces of timber must have taught their lesson well, for in that school there is not a boy who does not know what hypocrite means and who wouldn't hate to have one of these telltale reminders laid upon his desk as a sign that he had been a cheat.

It is a serious offense to cheat our fellowmen, but it is far more serious to try to cheat God. That is what the hypocrite does. He professes to fear God, but his manner of life proves otherwise. Let us search out our hearts before the Lord at this moment and confess every trace of hypocrisy, that we may be true prophets for the Lord.

Having divulged part of his identity, Jonah proceeds to tell the whole story. Probably the weight of his sin was getting too much for him. He had to tell someone, so he explained to the sailors that he was attempting to flee from the presence of the Lord, endeavoring to escape his duty to God. The mariners seemed more troubled by the fact that Jonah was fleeing from the presence of God than they were by the storm. For we read, "Then were the men exceedingly afraid, and said unto him, Why hast thou done this?" This was as if to say, "If you profess to fear Jehovah the God of Heaven, which hath made the sea and the dry land, how can you be so foolish as to think that you can escape His presence?" These men who knew nothing more than idol worship would not even think of attempting such a thing. How, then, could one who knew the true God think that he could escape the presence of his God? The sailors were perplexed, and rightly so.

I am sure Jonah did not sit down and reason out the entire course of his backsliding before he left his little home town in the hills. The backslider does not look far ahead. He lives only for the present. At the same time, he drifts farther and farther away from God, until he is lost in the disrupting storm; then suddenly he comes to his senses. He may find immediate deliverance by turning to God, by confessing his sin, and then claiming

forgiveness. This is where Jonah failed. Though he confessed to men, he failed to confess to the Lord.

When the Apostle Peter came to the end of himself, he cried out to the Lord Jesus, “Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord” (Luke 5:8). Likewise Paul said, “O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Romans 7:24-25). In their extremity these men turned to Him who could give help.

It may be that you have been drifting away from God. At one time you knew and loved Him, but lately you have been drifting away from Him. Oh, come back! God says, “Come now and let us reason together . . . though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow” (Isaiah 1:18). Whatever your need, Christ will meet you if you will come to Him. Do you need salvation? He died for you and paid the price for your sin. You can be saved simply by believing on Him. Do you need cleansing?

You say you are a Christian but you have sinned and broken fellowship with God. “The blood of Jesus Christ His [God’s] Son cleanseth us from all sin” (1 John 1:9). Let the Lord work in your life. Do not close your heart to God. Submit to Him at this moment. Let Him have complete possession.

Chapter 5

THE DESPERATION

“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. 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. Nevertheless the men rowed hard to bring it to the land; but they could not: for the sea wrought, and was tempestuous against them. 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. So they took up Jonah, and cast him forth into the sea: and the sea ceased from her raging. Then the men feared the Lord exceedingly, and offered a sacrifice unto the Lord, and made vows” (Joshua 1:11-16).

THE detection of Jonah’s sin having been made, the sailors turned to him in desperation asking, “What shall we do unto thee, that the sea may be calm unto us?” Since Jonah was the culprit, immediate action had to be taken against him. “The sea wrought,” we are told, “and was tempestuous.” Literally, it “kept growing more tempestuous.” The frightening storm was becoming worse and worse. Something had to be done quickly. Since Jonah was the proved cause of the storm, judgment had to be meted out to him. Thus the sailors asked, “What shall we do unto thee?”

It is well in every storm of life to look for the cause. Usually we are far more concerned about the cure than the cause. Rarely can there be a cure until we diagnose the cause. Does it seem that your life is nothing more than an endless chain of troubles? Possibly there is some reason for this that you should attempt to discover. You would do well to investigate. When the storm struck the little ship out in the midst of the sea, it was not long before the captain and his sailors went to work looking for the cause. At first they tried several remedies, but these were of no avail. It was not until they searched out and found the cause and dealt with it that they experienced the calm.

Is there a lack of serenity and peace in your life? Then get on your knees before God and earnestly pray, “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” (Psalm 139:23-24). Stay on your knees and keep praying until God reveals the cause of your misery. There is no other way to happiness until we deal with the root sin that may be producing sorrow in our lives.

What is true of the individual believer is also true of a body of believers. There are churches that outwardly appear to be prosperous: they have magnificent buildings, their budgets are increasing year by year, attendance is improving; but in spite of this apparent progress, in some there is a noticeable lack of spiritual power. Such churches are well described by our Lord in Revelation 3:17, “Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.” Even though a church may seem to be advancing, according to statistics, if souls are not being saved, if lives are not being transformed, if young people are not offering themselves to the Lord’s service, something is wrong; doubtless there is sin in the camp. Though such a church may be orthodox, with sound Bible teaching and well-trained leadership, it will be completely devoid of the power and the blessing of God until its sin is dealt with and its people yield to the Spirit’s fullness and control.

During the days of Christ’s earthly ministry, Jerusalem was the national capital of the Hebrews. The great temple was there; it drew worshipers from all over the ancient world for the annual feasts which, according to the law of Moses, required offerings of oxen, sheep, goats, and doves. Worshipers who came long distances could not bring the animals for sacrifice with them, but purchased them after reaching Jerusalem. This ready market resulted in the development of a stockyard business of growing, grooming, and selling the animals in and about the temple. Exorbitant prices were charged and usurious rates of exchange were practiced by the money-changers. All of this was carried on under the guise of promoting worship by providing the required sacrificial animals. Actually, it was nothing more than a grasping, greedy racket, foisted upon the people under the cloak of religion. Corrupt, sinful men were milking and fleecing the people.

When Christ saw what was going on, He did not call a prayer meeting about it; He did not call a board meeting and discuss it and appoint a committee to look into it; He did not in any way ignore it, tolerate it, or condone it. He broke it up. With twisted ropes He beat and ran the animals and traders out of the temple. He poured out the money and overthrew the tables, crying out, “It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves” (Matthew 21: 13).

Our Lord launched a direct and uncompromising attack on sin. There is no other way to please God. That is why the sailors asked Jonah, “What shall we do unto thee?” They knew that Jonah’s sin had to be dealt with if the storm were to subside. In Ephesians 5: 11 God says, “Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them.” This is what the anxious sailors desired: to reprove the works of darkness that they might have the approval of God.

Realizing the hopeless mess he was in, Jonah gave up. “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.” It is obvious that he had come to realize the futility of his disobedience. Disgusted with himself, he offers his body as a sacrifice for sin.

It is here that Jonah becomes a type of the Lord Jesus Christ in the sense that he presents himself as a willing sacrifice to die for others. Unlike Jonah, our Lord did not die for His own sin, for He had none. He died for the sins of others as their substitute. God “hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Corinthians 5:21). Paying the price for sin, Christ provided eternal peace for all who believe on Him. As Jonah had to die to provide peace and calm for the sailors, so our Lord had

to die to provide eternal peace for every storm-tossed soul lost in sin. It is through Christ's sacrificial death that the unsaved may be reconciled to God, finding the blessed quietness that only He can provide. In Colossians 1:20 we read of our wonderful Christ who, "having made peace through the blood of His cross," reconciled all things unto Himself.

Dr. Willard J. Lloyd, a prominent physician of Hartford, Connecticut, says one of the most startling things in the field of medicine today is the increase of death due to coronary thrombosis in both sexes and in all age groups from about the age of twenty-five on. Among various explanations for the sudden increase, he places world conditions high on the list¹ resulting in nervous tension, and worry resulting from lack of inner peace. He further states, "This condition is true because in many cases those suffering from this malady do not know the peace of God as found in Jesus Christ."

Do you know the peace of God as found in Jesus Christ? Have you come to Him, realizing that when He died on the cross He bore all your sins, providing full and complete forgiveness for you? In 1 Peter 2:24 we read that Christ "His own self bare our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed." The Lord Jesus paid the entire price. There is nothing any one of us can do to receive forgiveness for sin other than that which God has said: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved" (Acts 16:31). If you have not done so, may I urge you at this moment to receive Christ into your heart?

Most of us are prone to put off this important decision to a future day. But consider the fact that fifty per cent of the human race die before they are seventeen years old. Young people feel that because they are young they have a lease on life, and many old people act as though they expect to live a thousand years. But whether we are young or old, death is "just around the corner" for every one of us. And when the head is pillowed on the deathbed, there is not anyone in the world who can meet our need other than Jesus Christ. When we stretch out to die, nothing can be an anchor to the soul other than salvation in Christ.

There has been many an unsaved man who boasted of good health. But when forced to look death in the face, he quivered and acted like a coward begging for mercy. I heard of a man who lived to be ninety-two years old. All his life he claimed to be an infidel. But when he was on his deathbed, he turned to his niece and said, "Pray for me." How important it is that we be ready to meet Christ now.

Jonah offered himself as a sacrifice, that the men of the ship might continue to live. We must admire him for his willingness to suffer the penalty for his sin. On the other hand, we cannot help but respect the sailors in their treatment of the guilty one. The sailors were human. They did not want to destroy a life unless they were fully convinced that it was absolutely necessary. Thus, they made one final attempt to get the boat to the shore; but we are told that it was impossible: "Nevertheless the men rowed hard to bring it to the land; but they could not: for the sea wrought, and was tempestuous against them."

We see, too, that they tried prayer again: "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." Can you not hear these men calling on God in their extremity? I believe they were really serious in prayer. You will notice also that they did not call on their individual gods as before, when the storm first struck. They cried out to Jonah's God, the Lord Jehovah, recognizing Him as the One who sent the storm and also the One who could provide the calm.

Getting no response to their praying, they realized that God would not hear them until they executed judgment on Jonah's sin. So, as a last resort, "they took up Jonah and cast him forth into the sea: and the sea ceased from her raging." The moment sin was judged, God intervened and the elements were silenced.

All of this had a tremendous effect on the sailors. We read that "the men feared the Lord exceedingly, and

offered a sacrifice unto the Lord, and made vows.” Surrounded by the peace and calm God had provided, they knelt in humble contrition, offering up sacrifices unto Him. More than this, they “made vows,” which probably means that they promised the Lord that when they reached home they would continue to offer sacrifices to Him. Is it not sad that people wait for the storms of life to bring them to their spiritual senses? It is a delight to the heart of God to see them come even then, but how tragic that they do not claim the blessings of the Lord and avoid the storms.

As we leave the prophet Jonah at this stage of the narrative, there seems to be one word that describes his life—useless. Think what might have transpired in Nineveh up to this point had the prophet faithfully responded to God’s call and gone to the people with the Heaven-sent message. But is it not true that there are many believers like Jonah in our day? Even though they profess to be followers of Jesus Christ, as far as fruitful service for the Lord is concerned, they are useless.

Several years ago, while speaking at a youth conference, I met a very attractive high-school girl who had come for the week. Though she had received the Lord into her life several years before, she had an earnest desire to get to Hollywood some day and become an actress. If she were successful, she felt that she could use her money and influence to honor the Lord, little realizing the temptations that would confront her in Hollywood. As the week progressed, the Holy Spirit dealt with her. One morning toward the end of the week, she stood, in one of the fellowship periods, to give a testimony. She told how God had been speaking to her and that she was debating in her mind whether she should go to Hollywood or yield her life to the Lord to serve Him. Then she said, “While having my devotions last night, God settled this once and for all as I read Judges 18:5-6: ‘And they said unto him, Ask counsel, we pray thee, of God, that we may know whether our way which we go shall be prosperous. And the priest said unto them, Go in peace: before the Lord is your way wherein ye go.’” She further said that she realized that she had been seeking the way that seemed “prosperous,” but God’s message was clear to her, “Before the Lord is your way wherein ye go.”

“I am forgetting about Hollywood,” she said. “From this time on I want the Lord’s way for my life, that I might be useful for God.”

Do you want the Lord’s way for your life? Do you want to be useful for God? Could it be at this very moment that your life may be like Jonah’s—useless? There may be many who are like those described by Paul as “having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof” (2 Timothy 3:5). They profess to love Christ, but it is quite obvious that He does not have possession of their lives. They are useless to God. To be useful for Him, nothing will suffice other than complete and full surrender of oneself to His control. The Lord Jesus said in John 12:24, “Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.” We must be willing to die to our ambitions, however wonderful they may seem, and become alive only to His blessed will.

Before the Lord, at this very moment, can you honestly say in all things, “Not my will, but Thine be done”? If you cannot, why not bow before Him and seek a real working of the Spirit of God in your heart? Commit yourself to the Lord’s control completely, that your useless life might become a useful life for God.

There is a Chinese legend of a potter who sought to make a beautiful vase for the emperor. He wrought with tireless ambition to make a piece of porcelain which would surpass anything ever fashioned by human hands. All his efforts, however, seemed to fail. At length when he had tried for the last time with exceeding pains to make the vase and had his work already in the furnace, it appeared again to have failed. In his despair, he flung himself into the fire and his own body was consumed in the flames of his furnace.

Later when someone took the vase from the fire, it was found to be the most beautiful and wonderful piece of porcelain that had ever been produced. The tints and shadings were perfect.

It is certainly true that when self is sacrificed upon the altar of consecration, our work for Christ becomes beautiful and, best of all, acceptable and useful to Him. Thus, may I urge you to withhold nothing from the Lord who saved you. Do as Paul said in Romans 6:13, “Yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God.”

Should you doubt whether or not you are a Christian, you should settle this once and for all before you do anything else. Turn to Christ! Ask Him to come into your life and save you for all eternity. He will hear your prayer and you will be a new creature in Him.

Chapter 6

THE DETERMINATION

“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” (Jonah 1:17).

IN ANXIOUS desperation the disturbed mariners cast Jonah into the sea. It would seem that all hope for the prophet’s future was gone forever, but the eternal purposes of God were not to be thwarted. Thus we see God’s determination to preserve the life of His servant, that he might fulfill the mission to which he had been called —“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.”

For many centuries this verse has been the battleground for the critics. As far as I am concerned, it offers no disturbing problem, for since the God who prepared the “great fish” is the God of all, the Creator of Heaven and earth, He could easily provide this means to preserve the life of Jonah. There is no question about it, however —the entire transaction demands a miracle. This is the only satisfactory explanation. The prophet does not tell us how God performed the miracle. To him this is unnecessary. The important fact is that the Lord undertook perfectly in the hour of the prophet’s deepest need.

One reason why it is so easy for me to accept this incident as a historic fact is because of the testimony of the Lord Jesus, who indicated that Jonah’s preservation in the fish’s belly was a miracle. Matthew tells us that “Certain of the scribes and of the Pharisees came to Jesus saying, Master, we would see a sign from Thee” (Matthew 12:38). The word sign as used here means “miracle.” Our Lord replied to the scribes and Pharisees saying, “An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas: For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale’s [sea monster’s] belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth” (Matthew 12: 39- 40). Our Lord acknowledges Jonah’s experience as one of the outstanding miracles of the Old Testament, especially outstanding because it foreshadowed the greatest miracle of all history: His own resurrection from the dead.

It is not difficult to find unbelievers who will have nothing to do with the miraculous. They firmly argue that miracles are against nature, and that which is against nature cannot possibly exist. They are willing to believe only what they can appropriate and comprehend. Such a one will miss much in this life and, of course, unless he repents and turns to the Lord he will completely miss Heaven in the life to come. To one who has never been regenerated, made alive through the quickening power of the Holy Spirit, many things will seem impossible. But after one receives Christ and claims Him as Saviour and Lord, he enters the blessed assurance that our God “is

able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think” (Ephesians 3:20). It will not be difficult to believe that the Almighty God knows no limits or bounds.

Some seem to think that the day of miracles is past. Those of us who believe in the Lord, and trust Him for all things, know better. He is “the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever” (Hebrews 13:8). He is performing miracles every day, the greatest being that of transforming lost and dying sinners into children of righteousness. None of us need look very far to find walking miracles of God’s marvelous grace. These miracles can be found readily in almost every race and age group and among those of practically any social position. Once they were bound by the shackles of sin, but bowing before the Lord Jesus Christ, they repented and claimed the Son of God as their sin-bearer and Saviour. Before conversion, they were spiritually dead, but now, by the grace of God, they walk in newness of life.

On one occasion it was my privilege to hear the eminent preacher, the late Dr. Harry Rimmer. He told of his early years in the ministry, when he worked in a rescue mission in California. Late one night, while on his way home, he saw a drunken bum lying in the mud and filth of the gutter. Doctor Rimmer helped the drunk to his feet several times, but it seemed useless, for each time he fell to the ground in a heap. Finally God’s servant lifted the helpless derelict to his back and headed for the mission. Soon the man was cleaned up and tucked into bed. Doctor Rimmer told us that when he brought the man into the mission, the fellow workers told him that they had never seen a more disgusting sight.

The next day Doctor Rimmer talked to the man at length from the Scriptures. After listening carefully to the way of salvation through Jesus Christ, he went to his knees and called on the Lord in humble repentance. Was his conversion real? Absolutely! It was another in the endless chain of the mighty miracles of God. It seems almost incredible, but it is true—six months later this one who had been rescued by the power of Christ from the deepest depths of sin became the superintendent of that rescue mission. Many knew him later as Dad Williams, a stalwart saint of God with a radiant testimony and a reliant faith that seemed to surmount any obstacle.

Indeed, our God is a miracle-working God. There is nothing He cannot do. There is no one too far gone in sin for Him. There is no life He cannot change. There is no sin He will not forgive. Should it be that you have never turned to Him to receive His marvelous redemption through His Son, let me urge you to believe on Jesus Christ at this very moment. As God provided a “great fish” to swallow up Jonah, so He has provided a great salvation for all who will believe on Christ.

God could have kept Jonah alive in the sea without the fish. But He chose to prepare this fish and have it on the scene at the proper moment. The word “prepare” does not necessarily mean that God created a special fish for this particular occasion, but rather that He appointed one of His creatures to fulfill His purpose. Under no circumstances can God’s plans be frustrated. Thus we see that He uses the action of the sailors to bring about His intentions for Jonah. Doubtless the prophet thought his being thrown into the sea would end everything for him, failing to realize that it is impossible for God’s eternal purposes to be foiled by man. Indeed, this is one of the most important lessons we learn from the book of Jonah: God’s determination is at work, constantly bringing to pass His foreordained purposes.

It may be that even now you are suffering from some calamity or sorrow which seems to be an unbearable hardship. You have been praying for deliverance from it; yet in the providence of God this may be what He is using to bring to pass His perfect will in your life. Your trial may be the “great fish” that God has prepared to rescue you from the treacherous deep of some spiritual, physical, or mental tragedy.

It is wonderful to know that the Lord fully understands our every need. Just as He sent the fish to the appropriate place at the prescribed time to meet Jonah in his exigency, so He is never late in meeting all the needs of His people. We may not understand why God permits a particular thing; and as we contemplate the future, all

may appear hopeless. But there is nothing to fear; God is at work. Doubtless, Jonah must have given up all hope as he tumbled down and down into the great deep and suddenly found himself lodged in the fish's belly. We may be even more perplexed; but one thing is sure: God knows what He is doing, and since He makes no mistakes He will adequately undertake for His own. We are assured in 1 Samuel 12:22 that "The Lord will not forsake His people for His great name's sake: because it hath pleased the Lord to make you His people." The Lord will not fail us nor forget us. For this reason we must trust and believe Him.

The happiest life is the one that nestles and rests most quietly near to the heart of God. I am always impressed by the Apostle John's position in the painting of the Last Supper as we see him leaning upon Christ. That seems such an ideal place! Especially is it a place for us to lean as we patiently endure suffering, sorrow, or sadness. We must lean heavily upon Him with complete dependence and reliance upon His all-sufficiency.

Most of us have found blessed comfort in the reading and quoting of Romans 8:28 on various occasions. We are familiar with these assuring and comforting words of Scripture: "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to His purpose." We believe this great truth in a general way, but fail at times to apply it as we should. How we need to put it into practice at all times; for then, and only then, will we see what a difference it makes in our lives. Should the baby accidentally pull the pan of hot water off the stove and scald his arm, don't fret, but take it in stride, claiming God's peace, asking Him, "What lesson do You have for me in this? I know it is working together for good, but what are You trying to say, dear God, that I need to know?"

When your desk is piled high at the office and you have only a limited amount of time to get the work done and an old friend drops in to chat and he talks on and on, don't get irritable and unkind, but realize that even the interruptions are an essential part of Romans 8:28.

Do you see what I mean? This is the practical application of this verse. It can be applied to any of the many circumstances of our lives, and I am sure God intended that it should be so. This~ verse will keep us looking to Jesus; and if we are looking to Him, then everything that seems to go wrong or apparently is working against us will be seen in the light of the will of God, and we shall know that it is working together for good—to the glory of God.

Indeed, Romans 8:28 appears to me as another "great fish" God has prepared to swallow us up when, like Jonah, we come to the end of ourselves. The Lord permits us to come to this place frequently, for this is the place of blessing. Experience has proved to us that the end of self is the beginning of God. David cried out, "When my heart is overwhelmed: lead me to the rock that is higher than I" (Psalm 61:2). Like Jonah, there was nothing more he could do. He had to depend wholly upon God. Some of us have been a long while coming to this place, and others of us have never yet found it. This is the place of complete and full submission. There are no questions or doubts. We rely wholly on the Lord.

I am reminded of the mother who entered her little boy's room and was shocked to find him scratching a page of his Bible with a penknife.

"My boy, what are you doing?" she asked.

"Mother, I have been reading of that poor father who came to Jesus and said, 'If Thou canst do anything, have compassion on us and help us,' and I thought he ought not to say 'if' to Jesus; so I scratched it out."

Here is childlike reliance on the Lord that all of us who are older in the faith would do well to duplicate. There should be no "if's" in the Christian vocabulary, for as David says in Psalm 48:14, "This God is our God for ever and ever: He will be our guide even unto death." What have we to fear if God is our guide? He guides, not part of the time, but as the Psalmist says, "even unto death."

God was guiding Jonah even though Jonah sought to flee from the presence of the Lord. Though we

forsake God, it does not mean that He will forsake us. In fact, He says in Hebrews 13:5, “I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.” Most of us can recall numerous times when we turned from the Lord, but not one of us could name a time when He forgot us. Oh, it may seem as though He forgets us occasionally, but this is all part of our training as He leads us to a place of greater appreciation of His love and goodness.

As I think of God’s miraculous provision for Jonah by means of the great fish, there is one thought above all else that comes to my mind—the abundant mercy of God. Jonah did not deserve to be rescued from the sea. Everything in the book thus far would prove that he deserved to die. Why did God rescue him? Because of His great mercy! In Lamentations 3:22-23 we read, “It is of the Lord’s mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not; They are new every morning: great is Thy faithfulness.”

Have you fully recognized the mercy of God in your life? Possibly at this moment you are like Jonah, running away from God, out of fellowship with Him. The Lord has been dealing with you, first gently, then harshly; still you will not listen. May I remind you that God loves you? He loves you so much that He wants to swallow you up in His matchless love as you flounder in the sea of sin. In Romans 2:4 we read, “Despisest thou the riches of His goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?” God is not angry with you; He loves you. He desires that you enjoy His best. It is for this reason that He has been dealing with you as He has, that you might understand His great concern for you. This is basically why He preserved Jonah; and He is preserving you that you might please Him and, know and do His will. I cannot say what His will is for you. I know what it was for Jonah, for God has told us in His Word. I am quite sure what it is for my life, for God has made it clear to me. But as for you, no one can tell you; God’s will for your life must be determined by you alone. If you are willing to take time to wait on the Lord, I am sure He will speak to your heart and show you what His plan is for you.

After you come to know God’s will for your life, the next step is equally important—do it! There must be a wholehearted, consecrated effort to follow Christ. If it should be that you have been living in disobedience, confess your sin to the Lord and come back to Him. You may be sure that whatever place you offer God in your life, He will take. You may limit the reception of His goodness, but He will never limit His offer of it.

Standing on the deck of a ship in mid-ocean, one can see the sun reflected from the ocean’s depths. From a little boat on the mountain lake, one sees the sun reflected from shallow waters. Looking into the mountain spring, not more than six inches in diameter, one may see the same great sun. Look into the dewdrop of the morning, and there it is again. The sun has a way of adapting itself to its reflections. The ocean is not too large to hold it, nor the dewdrop too small. So God will fill with Himself, any man, whatever his capacity may be. We are told in John 1:16 that “of His fullness have all we received.” If you are a child of God, you have received “of His fullness,” but there is a greater blessing contingent upon full submission. Paul tells us this in Ephesians 3:19, as he prays that “Ye might be filled with all the fullness of God.” There are no limits here—it is “all the fullness,” not out of “the fullness.” Have you received all the fullness of God, or are you still controlled by self even though you are naming the name of Christ? Oh, believer in the Lord Jesus, yield fully to Him and then walk with Him, obeying Him, doing His blessed will.

If you have not claimed Him as your Saviour and Lord, this is the beginning point. Nothing can precede this step of faith. Just now, invite Christ to come into your life, and immediately your name will be written in the Lamb’s Book of Life, with the promise that you will be “kept by the power of God” (1 Peter 1:5).

THE DECISION

“Then Jonah prayed unto the Lord his God out of the fish’s belly, 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. 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. Then I said, I am cast out of Thy sight; yet I will look again toward Thy holy temple” (Jonah 2:1-4).

GOD’S ETERNAL DECREES are not dependent upon frail humans. In rebellion to God’s plan for his life, Jonah sought to “flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the Lord.” At first, the prophet seemed to be successful in his attempt, but divine determination always wins. Thus the great fish was God’s answer to Jonah’s disobedience, for it was in the fish’s belly that Jonah made his decision, which was the turning point in his flight from God.

We read that “Jonah prayed unto the Lord his God out of the fish’s belly.” To whom did Jonah pray? The Lord his God! Though he had gotten far away from God’s will, he realized that the Lord was his possession. Jonah forsook the Lord, but the Lord never turned from Jonah. This reminds me of the prodigal who had fallen into deep sin and wandered far from his father’s loving care. But in the midst of his squalor, poverty, and debauchery he cried out, “I will arise and go to my father.” Though he had transgressed his father’s desire and turned his back on his loving kindness, the relationship of father and son had never been broken. Jonah realized this was true of his relationship to God, that even though he was out of fellowship with the Lord, being chastened severely, yet he was still a child of God.

This truth is difficult for the human mind to comprehend because we are so selfish and unkind. God is all-righteous and holy. His love has no limitations. Thus Christ says to all who sincerely believe in Him, “I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand. My Father, which gave them Me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of My Father’s hand” (John 10:28-29).

It was on the ground of this glorious truth that Jonah prayed to his God. The prophet understood well his own treacherous heart, but he knew also that God is unchangeable in His grace and love. Thus, even though he was imprisoned in the close, dark dungeon of a fish’s belly, he still had the privilege of prayer.

Praise God, there is never a time when the true, repentant believer does not have this privilege. No matter where we are or what the conditions may be, God declares that we are to pray. He says, “Men ought always to pray, and not to faint” (Luke 18:1); “Pray without ceasing” (1 Thessalonians 5:17); “In every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God” (Philippians 4:6); “Continuing instant in prayer” (Romans 12:12). There is no time when the believing saint should not be praying. There are no circumstances in which the child of God should not call on the Lord. He is to keep in the attitude of prayer; regardless of his own personal failures, he should not neglect this holy prerogative.

A bright little girl, aged four, and her brother, aged six, were spending the night with their aunt. When bedtime came, the aunt asked them how they said their prayers. The little girl answered, “Sometimes I say them at Mother’s knees, and sometimes by the side of the bed.” Turning to the boy she said, “How about you, Jimmy?”

“Oh, I don’t need to pray. I sleep with Daddy.”

We may smile at this; but as a matter of fact, are there not many grownups who think they can get along very well without prayer until, like Jonah, they are caught in some dire emergency or calamity? Jonah had to pray. He couldn’t do anything else. Prayer should be more than a compulsion; it should be the joy of the believing heart.

Jonah does not seek to hide anything. Unashamedly he tells us why he prayed: “I cried by reason of mine affliction.” Doubtless he was frightened, not only because of the fear of losing his life, but also because of the solemn thought of soon standing face to face before the God he had so sorely abused. But as is always the case, when one prays, the door to hope and blessing will open.

“He heard me,” Jonah exclaimed. How did he know God heard him? His joyous heart told him so. He realized, too, that there had never been a time, when he prayed, that God did not hear him. Doubtless he must have recalled the words of David, “I love the Lord, because He hath heard my voice and my supplications. Because He hath inclined His ear unto me, therefore will I call upon Him as long as I live. The sorrows of death compassed me, and the pains of hell gat hold upon me: I found trouble and sorrow. Then called I upon the name of the Lord; O Lord, I beseech Thee, deliver my soul” (Psalm 116: 1-4). Though the circumstances differed, Jonah was in the same predicament that David had been in. There was only one escape—prayer. But he had the assurance in his heart that God would hear.

Where did Jonah get this assurance? It was God-given. Even this assurance is a divine gift of our gracious and loving Lord. Thus, through the grace of God at work in his life, Jonah accepted his deliverance by faith as an accomplished fact in God’s providence. This is indeed believing prayer. Of course, this is what all prayer should be. We should never utter a petition without rising from our knees with the confidence that God will undertake in His own time and in His own way. Anything short of this is to doubt God, for He declares emphatically in Isaiah 65:24, “And it shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear.” Not only does He hear us, but He declares that He will answer us. This is the realization that Jonah had. He says, “I cried . . . He heard.”

We should keep in mind that there is no situation too difficult for prayer. Jonah declares, “Out of the belly of hell cried I, and Thou heardest my voice.” I believe Jonah was just about as close to death as any man could be. Some believe that he actually died. Most of us will agree that as far as his sins were concerned, he was just about as low as any believer could go. But with a repentant heart he prayed, and God heard him.

The Lord Jesus likened Jonah’s three days and three nights in the fish’s belly to His own experience of being three days and three nights in the grave. It is obvious that Jonah’s remark about “the belly of hell,” or literally, “the belly of Sheol,” means that he was actually in his grave, the prison to which he had been condemned for his disobedience to God. How low some of us have to be brought before we are willing to surrender to the Lord’s control! What sorrow and calamity we bring upon ourselves because of willing disobedience!

Jonah deserved to die in the fish’s belly for his hardness of heart in resisting his God-given duty. There seems to be not one reason why the Lord should have heard his cries from the fish’s belly. How do you account for it? There is only one answer. It is for the same reason that the Lord provided a fish to swallow up Jonah in the first place—the mercy of God. Who of us could begin to fathom God’s mercy in dealing with sinful and rebellious hearts? It was true of Jonah, as it is of us, as we read in Psalm 57:3, God “shall send from heaven, and save me from the reproach of him that would swallow me up. . . . God shall send forth His mercy and His truth.” Jonah deserved hell—and so do we—but all of Heaven opens to the repentant heart. David says in Psalm 34:6, “This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles.” There is no reason why God should hear any of us, but His mercy directs His ear toward those who come to Him in repentance.

Commenting on Psalm 136 in Our Daily Homily, Dr. F. B. Meyer tells us that “twenty-six times in this Psalm we are told that God’s mercy endureth forever. The Psalmist looked back over the past, and as his eye traveled back as far as the creation, he could see all through the stormy, troublesome days the silver thread of God’s mercy. Oh, that we had his eyes to see always the love of God! Amid the murky gloom of chaos there is a silver gleam; it is His mercy. When the sun and the moon appear, there is a brighter light than theirs; it is His

mercy. Above the roar of the Red Sea and the rattle of thunderstorms are the flute-like notes of His mercy. Through all the strife and horror of the conquest of Canaan, there glides the white-robed angel of His mercy. Deeper than the darkest shades of sin, higher than the highest floods of transgression, is the love of God in the hand of whom the round world and all its inhabitants lie, as a drop on the palm. Look back on your life, and say whether you cannot see the thread of mercy linking all its beads. . .

“And do you suppose that such mercy is going to fail you? It endureth forever! You fret and chafe like a restless little child; but you cannot fall out of the arms of God’s mercy. Lie still; it canopies you like a mother’s face; it breathes about you like a mother’s embrace. O love that will not let us go! O mercy that hath neither beginning nor end! O God, who hast loved, who lovest, and who wilt love, when the sun is no more and the things that now are shall have passed away as a dream! O grace of God, exceeding in Thy abundance the highest mountains of our sin!”

Have you experienced God’s mercy in salvation? Have you come to know Jesus Christ as your very own? It was the Lord’s mercy that sent His Son to the cross to die for you and for me: “God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8). Have you appropriated God’s gift of life by receiving Christ into your heart? Neglect His mercy no longer! Experience the mercy of the Lord at this moment!

Jonah further tells us of his experience, being cast into the sea: “the floods compassed me about: all Thy billows and Thy waves passed over me.” He enlarges upon this in verses 5 and 6 of chapter two, but notice, in his description, who cast him into the sea: “For Thou hadst cast me into the deep.” Did not the sailors throw him into the turbulent waters? Do we not read in verse 15 of the first chapter, “So they [the sailors] took up Jonah, and cast him forth into the sea”? The sailors were merely instruments in the hands of God. Jonah realized that it was God who cast him into the sea, that it was God who prepared the great fish to swallow him up, that it was God who chastened him.

It is for this reason that the prophet comes to his great decision. He says, “I am cast out of Thy sight; yet I will look again toward Thy holy temple.” Praise God, he is coming back. Up to this point we have seen him endeavoring to flee from the presence of the Lord; but now he is seeking the presence of the Lord. God’s chastisement had disturbed him but God’s mercy had overwhelmed him. The prophet had gone far away from God but not too far from the mercy of God.

Jonah’s statement, “I am cast out of Thy sight,” means that he was cast out of God’s favorable regard. He had broken fellowship with the Lord. He had not lost his salvation but rather the joy of his salvation. The situation changes instantly, however, as Jonah repents, saying, “I will look again toward Thy holy temple,” literally, “I will look Intently toward Thy holy temple.” The prophet had turned his face away from God; but now, looking boldly into the face of his Lord, he says in essence, “I will keep my eyes fixed on Thee, O God.”

David had made a similar declaration in Psalm 121:1, “I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help,” literally, “I will lift up mine eyes beyond the hills, unto Him who gives me help.” How we need to keep our eyes fixed upon the Lord. We must look to Him constantly or we shall become an easy mark for the subtle ways of the great deceiver. Caleb could say with sincerity, “I wholly followed the Lord my God” (Joshua 14:8). Many of God’s people cannot say this because their eyes are turned toward the things of the flesh and the world, rather than focused upward on Him.

I am sure that at one time or another you have turned on your radio and heard the announcer say with breathless eagerness: “Listen carefully now. Here’s all you have to do: Finish this sentence in twenty-five words or less. . . .” That is all there is to it: just finish that sentence and mail your entry together with one box top from the large-size package of their product and you may be the winner of one of the giant cash awards. Surely you

have heard this many times.

There is a very serious lesson we can learn from such an announcement. I would like to give you a sentence to complete, not with twenty-five words or less, but with only one word. There are only six words in this sentence; the one you will insert will make seven. But the word you insert will mean the difference between happiness or misery, peace or unrest, joy or sorrow. Here is the sentence: “For to me to live is. . . .” Honestly now, how will you finish that sentence? Some must say, “For to me to live is selfishness”; or, “For to me to live is business”; or, “For to me to live is money.” Scores of other words could be used but only one word is correct—Christ! “For to me to live is Christ.” Up to this point in the book of Jonah the prophet had to say, “For to me to live is self.” Though he believed in the Lord, he lived for himself. For whom are you living?

Maybe you have gotten away from God. At one time you knew Him and loved Him, but you have drifted. Possibly you have yielded to some devastating sin. As the result, you have been fleeing from the presence of the Lord. You are out of fellowship with Him.

While speaking at a Youth for Christ meeting in New Jersey, I had emphasized the importance of the believer’s fellowship with God. Immediately after the service a young couple came to me and introduced themselves. The young man told me he was a graduate of a certain Bible school. Though I knew nothing of their circumstances, the Lord directed me to ask the question, “And what are you doing for God now?” Shamefacedly, the young man bowed his head and answered, “I’ve been on the shelf lately. I got a little ahead of the Lord and He put me on the shelf.” I said, “If you are ready to do business with God and accept His will for your life, He is ready to work through you.” I gave him Isaiah 55:7: “Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon.” I am sorry to say that this young man refused to give the Lord first place in his life.

Maybe you have been on the shelf as far as your usefulness for the Lord is concerned. Possibly you have yielded to some sin that God hates. The mercy of the Lord still avails for you at this moment. God’s plea to you is to return to Him. If only you will confess your sin and repent, He will forgive you and at the same time empower you.

8

THE DESCRIPTION

“The waters compassed me about, even to the soul: the depth closed me round about, 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: yet hast Thou brought up my life from corruption, O Lord my God” (Jonah 2: 5-6).

IN THE OPENING VERSES of the second chapter of Jonah, the prophet tells us of his decision to get right with the Lord. Having been cast into the sea and swallowed by a great fish, Jonah came to the end of his own resources and turned to God. There were many reasons why Jonah should not have been received back again, but God’s unfailing mercy was sufficient.

Having told us of his fresh experience with the Lord, Jonah proceeds to give a vivid description of his incarceration in the fish’s belly: “The waters compassed me about, even to the soul.” The prophet’s life was threatened, and had it not been for the grace of God, Jonah would have expired. Further he says, “the depth closed

me round about.” He was shut up in a living grave out of which no human escape was possible. Next he tells us of his surroundings, which must have been most uncomfortable, “the weeds were wrapped about my head.”

Doubtless the fish had swallowed not only Jonah but considerable seaweed as well, There was Jonah floundering in this entangling mass, all adding to the confusion of his distressing dilemma.

Jonah continues by saying, “I went down to the bottoms of the mountains.” That is, to their extremities, at the bottom of the sea where they terminate. “The earth with her bars was about me for ever.” The prophet must have thought the end had come for sure. It seemed as though the bars of death were closing in on him so that he would never see the earth again.

But look at the next statement, “yet hast Thou brought up my life from corruption, O Lord my God.” What thrilling words! What joy must have flooded the soul of Jonah as he exclaimed this rapturous truth. Praise God, there are no depths to which the mercy of the Lord cannot descend. Considering this manifestation of God’s goodness to the prophet, we say with Micah of old, “Who is a God like unto Thee, that pardoneth iniquity and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of His heritage? He retaineth not His anger for ever, because He delighteth in mercy” (Micah 7:18).

There is no question about it, Jonah’s experience in the fish’s belly was unusual. But while it is true that the circumstances surrounding Jonah’s experience were unusual, yet in a very definite sense God is rescuing helpless souls from their prisons of death every day. There is a striking similarity between Jonah’s deliverance from physical death and the believer’s deliverance from spiritual death.

If you are a child of God, can you not say of your past, “the waters compassed me about, even to the soul”? It may be questionable as to whether or not the prophet suffered physical death in the fish’s belly, but there is no question about man’s state before conversion. He is spiritually dead with no hope of life apart from a divine quickening. Paul declares in Ephesians 2: 1, “And you hath He quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins.” All those who have not yet trusted in Christ for salvation, though physically alive, are spiritually dead. Until one is reborn by God’s power he will remain in his condition of spiritual death. Belief in Jesus Christ is the gateway to real life. The moment one believes on the Lord Jesus, he is delivered from eternal death and made a new creature in Christ. God tells us in 2 Corinthians 5: 17, “Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.”

Doubtless, everyone who has experienced the divine quickening by believing on the Lord Jesus Christ will sense the reality of Jonah’s statement, “the depth closed me round about.” Does this not suggest the mighty grip sin had on us before we were converted? Those outside of Christ are locked and barred in a prison of sin from which there is no possible escape without a miracle of God’s grace. They may try hard to overcome sin’s power, and in their attempt they may be fairly successful in producing a few good works that please the human eye. But as far as God’s righteousness and holiness are concerned, they fail miserably. We read in Ecclesiastes 7:20 that “there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not.” Human effort cannot possibly remedy one’s spiritual incompetency. God declares in Ecclesiastes 1: 15, “That which is crooked cannot be made straight.” Man is crooked, out of fellowship with God, by virtue of the fact that he was born a sinner. Thus he cannot be made straight or righteous without a second or a new birth. Jesus said in John 3:3, “Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” Yet, in spite of what the Bible says, there are millions in the world trying to save themselves by mere human attempts to produce righteousness rather than by submitting to the claims of Christ.

The story is told of an Indian and a white man who were brought under deep conviction of sin by the same sermon. The Indian readily received Christ into his heart and rejoiced in God’s pardoning mercy. For a long time the white man was in distress almost to despair. But at last he was converted and came to a sweet sense of his sins

forgiven. Meeting his Indian brother later, he said to him, "How is it that I was so long under conviction when you found peace at once?"

"Indian will tell white brother," was the reply. "There came along a rich prince. He proposed to give you a new coat. You look at your coat and say, 'I don't know. My coat pretty good. It will do a little longer.' He then offers me a new coat. I look at my old blanket. I say, 'This good for nothing,' and accept the beautiful garment. Just so, Brother, you try to keep your own righteousness. You won't give it up. But I, a poor Indian, had none; so I glad at once to receive the righteousness of God, the Lord Jesus Christ."

Not only are the unsaved defiled and bound by sin without any righteousness of their own, but they are dolefully confused and disturbed. Jonah said, "the weeds were wrapped about my head." This reminds me of the mixed-up, chaotic condition of millions in the world because of the lack of a heart belief in Him who provides consolation and equanimity for troubled minds. What Isaiah said is indeed true, "There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked" (Isaiah 57:21). He did not say there is little peace or there is partial peace to the wicked; he said there is no peace. The unsaved are as bewildered and disconcerted as Jonah was as he twisted and rolled in the entangling mass of slimy seaweed in his prison cell. Oh, if only lost and dying men would come to Christ and receive God's wonderful peace and joy. Their cares would lighten and their minds would be at rest.

One time a boy stood before his class, reading from his history book, "William the Conqueror landed in England 1066 A. D." The teacher interrupted, asking what the A. D. stood for. The boy pondered briefly and then replied slowly, "I don't exactly know, unless it could mean 'after dark.'"

His answer was not too far wrong, for it was after the dark of Greek and Roman paganism that Jesus came, who put real meaning into Anno Domini, "the year of our Lord."

Can it not be said also that everyone who believes on Jesus Christ may mark the instant of his conversion with an A. D.—"after dark"? Through the grace and mercy of God, the believer is forever delivered from the darkness resultant from sin's bondage. God says in Proverbs 4: 19, "The way of the wicked is as darkness: they know not at what they stumble." But for those who come to the Lord, there is eternal deliverance, as we read in Psalm 107: 14, "He brought them out of darkness and the shadow of death, and brake their bands in sunder." even though there maybe divers problems confronting us, we are recipients of God's perfect peace because of His covenant of grace with us. We have been delivered forever from the hopelessness of the darkness that shrouds the unsaved mind in things pertaining to God. Though occasionally we find ourselves in unhappy and disturbing circumstances, with confidence and assurance we may rest in the peace of God's unfailing goodness. It is the firm realization of this fact that provides the believer with abounding joy. Someone has said, "The Lord's presence can make His people happy in a dungeon." Many of God's faithful servants have found this to be wondrously true.

Those who have not yet come to the Lord must grope about in the darkness of this world in mere human energy and strength. But those who have trusted in the living Christ know the blessedness of the glorious life He gives to direct every step of the way. Jesus said in John 8:12, "I am the light of the world: he that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life." There need be no more darkness for those who are saved, for His presence surrounds us with light.

One Sunday morning, on a shuttle train coming in to Philadelphia, an instructor in a theological school was sharing a seat with a small boy. The boy was holding a Sunday-school lesson leaflet.

"Do you go to Sunday school, my boy?" asked the man in a friendly way.

"Yes, sir." Thinking he would have some fun with the lad the man said, "Tell me, my boy, where God is and I'll give you an apple." The boy looked up sharply at the man and promptly replied, "Mister, I will give you a whole barrel of apples if you tell me where He is not."

Seemingly this child had already mastered a marvelous truth that many veteran saints have not yet learned

to appreciate. So often we become excited and worry needlessly because of our lack of faith and dependence on God. Why should we worry? Darkness has been banished. Christ is the true light. We have been delivered from confusion and perplexity to walk in His perfect peace with the confidence that His unfailing presence surrounds us constantly.

In his extraordinary ride below the sea, Jonah relates that he “went down to the bottoms of the mountains.” It is doubtful that one could descend much lower than this. And yet, is it not true that all around the world there are human derelicts that have descended to the very lowest depths of sin?

Recently one of our radio listeners, a converted alcoholic, wrote to me and stated that before his conversion he had “committed every sin in the book.” His wife and children went without necessities while he spent every penny he got on drink. He lied and cheated to get more money to buy more liquor. He went down into the lowest depths of sin. But in his despair, he heard the gospel and, believing on Christ, he was saved. Praise God, no one can go so low that Christ cannot save.

Some, however, have been deluded into thinking that, because they have not gone to the lowest depths of sin, they do not need salvation. From their viewpoint, Jesus died only for the down-and-outers. The Word of God teaches that the gospel is for the up-and-outer as well. The man on skid row is not different in kind from the rest of us; he is merely worse in degree. On skid row we see fallen man at his dismal worst. In the better neighborhoods we see him at his polished best. But he is the same man, for all his disguise. In the gutter we find him chained by dope, drink, and dirt. In suburbia we find him bound by pride, greed, and lust. To God there is no difference, for He says, “all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). Since all have sinned, the same remedy—the shed blood of the Lord Jesus Christ—must be applied to all. Belief in the Son of God is the only escape from sin and its consequences. A new birth and the impartation of a new life through Jesus Christ is the blessed result.

Jonah thought that the end of his life had come, that he would never see the earth again—“the earth with her bars was about me for ever.” In hopeless disgust he had given up. There are many in our day who are disheartened and sorrowful, thinking they might just as well end it all. The past has been clouded by anguish and ruined by failure, resulting in what appears to be a hopeless future. For them the only solution seems to be that which Job’s wife offered her husband in his time of great crisis — “Curse God, and die” (Job 2:9). Of course, this is not a solution at all. Suicide is never a solution; it only makes matters worse.

But thanks be to God, there is a solution! Listen to Jonah, “Yet hast thou brought up my life from corruption, O Lord my God.” How heartening and encouraging these words are for the seemingly hopeless cases. From God’s perspective, there is no such thing as a hopeless case. No matter how far down one may go in sin, God’s grace can raise him up.

What do we read in Romans 5:20? “Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound.” God’s unmerited favor is available for any sin. If the sinner repents and turns to the living Christ, receiving Him as Lord of the life, there is immediate forgiveness available for the past and deliverance for the future. God says in Romans 3:24, “Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.” The Lord’s amazing grace is sufficient, whatever the spiritual condition of the soul may be.

At this very moment, if you are away from God, you may turn to Him and by faith claim Christ as your Saviour and Lord. The shackles of sin will be broken and you will receive the marvelous deliverance that will flood your heart with the joy of the Lord. Have you come to Christ? If not, do not delay; delay may mean death.

Early on the morning of June 5, 1946, fire swept through the twenty-two-story Hotel LaSalle in Chicago. Within minutes the main outside exits and stairway exits from the floors above were blocked by flames. Most of the eleven hundred patrons had retired to their rooms. The fire raged for three hours. It was Chicago’s worst hotel

tragedy and the most serious hotel fire in the nation in more than thirteen years. Over two hundred persons were injured and sixty lives were lost, Smoke, panic, and intense heat claimed most of the victims. At least ten persons leaped to certain death from windows high above the street. Fire commissioner Michael J. Corrigan said, "Many of the deaths were tragically unnecessary."

A few moments before the fire occurred, a Chicago milliner telephoned his wife from the hotel to say he was playing bridge there with friends. His wife said afterwards, "I asked him when he would be home, and he said he would come as soon as he finished the hand they were playing." But that was not soon enough. His wife identified his body at the county morgue later that day. One hand of bridge cost this man his life.

How often when one is asked in the spiritual sense, "When are you coming home?" he answers, "After I do this—that—or the other thing." And before he is aware of it, death has overtaken him and he is ushered into a lost eternity. God says, "To day if ye will hear His voice, Harden not your heart" (Psalm 95:7-8). "Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation" (2 Corinthians 6:2).

Miss Anita Blair of El Paso, Texas, a blind lecturer, was on the eleventh floor of the LaSalle Hotel at the time of the fire. But she followed her seeing-eye dog, Fawn, to safety. Following Fawn into the hallway, she related, "He made the way through noise, smoke, and confusion to a window and down eleven floors of an outside fire escape."

For all spiritually blind persons, faith is the seeing eye needed to go through all the noise, smoke, and religious confusion of the day, "For we walk by faith, not by sight" (2 Corinthians 5:7).

If you possess any doubt whatsoever relative to your soul's salvation, at this~ very moment bow before God and claim His beloved Son as your own Saviour and Lord. Let Him wash away all your sin, never to be remembered any more. Let Him deliver you from your prison of misery and grief. God's grace is sufficient. Whatever your spiritual need, Christ is adequate.

9

THE DENUNCIATION

"When my soul fainted within me I remembered the Lord: and my prayer came in unto Thee, into Thine holy temple. They that observe lying vanities forsake their own mercy" (Jonah 2:7-8).

JONAH HAS GIVEN US a striking description of his experience in his living grave. From what he says, it is obvious that this was the most trying experience of his life. Most of us have learned, however, that divine chastenings are not without their purposes. This was never more true than in Jonah's case. One by one, we shall see the purposes of God being effected in Jonah's life.

His greatest need, as is ours, was victory over the self-life. If he was to fulfill God's plan completely, the prophet had to come to the place of entire submission to the Lord. Thus, now we see his denunciation of self in preparation for his full surrender to the plan of God.

He begins by saying, "When my soul fainted within me I remembered the Lord." Recall how he left the sweet highlands of his own country and hastened to the seashore to make his exodus to Tarshish. His soul was not faint then. He was rebellious and proud, controlled wholly by self rather than the Spirit. In the providence of God, the situation has changed entirely. Now the prophet has come to the end of his own resources. He has

fainted within himself.

In his dark, cramped dungeon there does not seem to be the slightest ray of hope; but suddenly the light of God's glory floods his soul. "I remembered the Lord," he says. What do you think he remembered about the Lord? There is no question in my mind; he recalled God's unfailing mercy. In Lamentations 3:32 we read this blessed promise, "But though He cause grief, yet will He have compassion according to the multitude of His mercies." The Lord sent grief into Jonah's life, that, like Jacob of old, he might be broken of self and turn from sense to faith. Using his own ingenuity, Jonah must have thought he was pretty clever as he hurried along in his selfish attempt to flee from the presence of the Lord. But now he realizes how foolish and ridiculous the self-life is.

Most of us are plagued constantly by the age-old problem of self. We know what the Bible teaches relative to full surrender, but for some reason we permit ourselves to be controlled by the foolish demands of the flesh. Paul confessed that "when I would do good, evil is present with me" (Romans 7:21). What was the evil present with him? The temptation to pursue his own selfish interests rather than the Lord he loved. Who could begin to number the Christians who have been rendered powerless and useless because of their failure to claim victory over self? They have never come into the blessing of the life mastered by the love of God.

What do we mean by "self"? Someone has defined it as "that touchy thing within you." If we are not controlled by the Lord's power, then we shall be overcome by that touchy thing within us. We shall seek immediately to vindicate ourselves, for the selfish life cannot face opposition or censure.

Most of us find it so difficult to be silent in the face of what appears to be unjust criticism. It seems to be the natural thing to prove that we are right. If the criticism has any indication of being a personal attack, the spontaneous inclination seems to be to fight back. Yet God's Word is very clear on this point. At no time is the true believer to vindicate himself nor avenge the harm done to his reputation.

Hear the Word of God as recorded in Romans 12:19: "Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord." Further we see in Matthew 5:39 that the Lord Jesus spoke on this point with certainty; "But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also." Not only did our Lord Jesus Christ say this, He practiced it in His life. The Apostle Peter gives a testimony to this fact as he says, "For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow His steps. . . . Who, when He was reviled, reviled not again; when He suffered, He threatened not; but committed Himself to Him that judgeth righteously" (1 Peter 2:21, 23).

Such an attitude of heart and mind seems to be one of the greatest needs in Christians today. Many who are well versed in the Scriptures, diligent and faithful in church attendance, and consistent in other areas of Christian responsibility, are complete failures in overcoming the basic sin of self that so often ruins a Christian testimony.

It is clearly a matter of living by faith rather than sense. Jonah had lived by sense but it proved useless. He learned that his only hope was faith. Faith is the satisfying and victorious hope. As Jonah remembered the Lord, he reached out to God in faith, and then he says, "my prayer came in unto Thee, into Thine holy temple." Though sense had vanished and as far as his capabilities were concerned Jonah was as a dead man, faith reached from the fish's belly into the presence of the living God as the prophet poured out his heart in prayer. Thus, when self is crucified, faith will carry us into the presence of the living Lord with the assurance that He will hear us, and with the confidence that He who hears and understands will undertake.

The believer need not fight his own battles. God will do it for him. Our reputation is always safe in God's

keeping; and, if it is the will of the Lord that the child of God become the offscouring of the world or, infinitely worse, of the brethren, God will take care of it. Let us not misunderstand, however; God will never vindicate us over our enemies if we are in the wrong. But if, like Jonah, we come clean before God, if we repent, -if we cry humbly before the Lord, He will hear.

Oh, child of God, let the Spirit of the Lord search out your heart at this moment. Who is in the place of rulership—Christ or self? Do not wait until God brings some severe trial upon you, as He had to do with Jonah; go to your knees at this moment and die to yourself. Enter into that blessed experience of which Paul speaks in Galatians 2:20: “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me.”

Jonah denounced the self-life while in the fish’s belly. How do I know? Because of his words, “They that observe lying vanities forsake their own mercy.” The lying vanities of which he speaks are idols. Jonah knew well the shallow worthlessness of idols. The sailors had cried aloud to their idols on the ship’s deck to no avail. Jonah was speaking out of experience, not so much from what he had seen, but from what he had known in his own heart. Well did he realize that he was worshiping one of the worst idols of every generation, not that made of stone or wood, but the idol of the human heart—self. The prophet knew that when a man worships self he forsakes the mercy of God, for self becomes the idol of the life and God is ruled out.

Could it be that you are worshiping the idol of self? You say you have believed on Christ, you are naming Him as your Lord, and yet you are worshiping yourself. Maybe your soul needs to faint within you, as in the case of Jonah, so that you will come to the end of your own resources and realize that you must remember the Lord, you must look wholly and fully to Him, not depending upon sense but wholly upon Christ. God wants to do a great work through your life, but because of the self-life you are limiting the Holy One of Israel. Oh, claim victory at this moment.

When Jesus Christ died on the cross, He died not only to provide salvation from sin but salvation from self. This fact is stated in 2 Corinthians 5: 15: “He died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them, and rose again.” Have you entered into the fullness of this provision of Calvary? Possibly you say, I want to, I have tried and tried, but have failed miserably. May I ask, how were you saved? Did you try and try to be saved or did you receive the gift of life, recognizing your own incapability to do anything to obtain salvation? If you are saved, you did not try to be saved; you were saved as God’s Word teaches—by faith and faith only. By faith you received the Lord Jesus Christ into your life. Victory over the self-life can be claimed only in the same way. It is not achieved; it is received.

In Romans 12:2 Paul says, “And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.” The Holy Spirit gave the apostle a great truth that you and I need to realize daily: we are not to be “conformed” but “transformed.” Many of us are struggling in our attempt to avoid conformity to worldliness and the people of the world. Unquestionably, selfishness can be classified as the root sin of worldliness. Thus we resist to the extent that we even become nonconformists. But nonconformity never produces victory. It is always a battle and a struggle. For this reason the apostle tells us that we are not to be conformed but rather to be transformed. None of us can transform himself. This is a supernatural work of God which can be wrought only by Christ. Those who receive the living Christ have the privilege of receiving the victory with Him and in Him. Believers are left without excuse. God has made every essential provision. Regrettably, few of us have claimed the fullness of our inheritance in Christ.

One of the great delusions that has entered the minds of many Christians is to think they can live the victorious life. You have never lived the victorious life, nor have I. The only One who ever lived the victorious life

is the Lord Jesus Christ. The victorious life is not a life we experience, but rather one we live out. It is the out-living of the indwelling Christ. As He indwells the believer, He lives out His life from within. Our part is to let go and let God do the work. The Lord Jesus, by virtue of the fact of His death and resurrection, is the Victor. As He is permitted, He indwells and lives out His glorious victory through those who believe. Thus we can say with Paul, "Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 15: 57).

During one of my visits at Canadian Keswick, I shared the platform with Dr. Walter Main. He told of another conference where he had spoken, in which the song leader taught the congregation a little chorus:

On the victory side, On the victory side.
No foe can daunt me, No fear can haunt me;
On the victory side, On the victory side.
With Christ within, the fight we'll win, On the victory side.

The congregation sang this chorus with its catchy tune and meaningful words a number of times. Later in his message Doctor Main dwelt further on this same theme of victory in Christ. Following the service, a young lady came to him, stating that she needed help. She asked what she could do to get victory in her life.

"For," she said, "I have tried time and time again. I go along for a while and everything is all right, and then I blow my top." Doctor Main replied, "What can you do to get victory? Absolutely nothing!" A look of despair came over the young lady's face as Doctor Main continued, "Nothing! Nothing! Absolutely nothing!" Then he said, "What was that chorus we sang tonight?" She was able to quote all of it. Then he asked, "Do you see it?"

"No," she said.

"Quote it again," he suggested. She went all through it again, word for word. Then Doctor Main said, "We do not get victory, we have victory. 'With Christ within, the fight we'll win, On the victory side.'"

Suddenly the young lady realized, for the first time in her Christian experience, that she had a possession she had never claimed. She was searching for victory, when all the time she had victory within herself in the person of the Victor, the Lord Jesus Christ. She discovered that her obligation was not to try to get victory, but to die to self and yield to Christ's control—and experience the victory.

We read in 1 John 5:4-5, "For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?" Are you born of God? Have you received the Victor, Jesus Christ, into your life? Then you have the blessed privilege of overcoming the world. What is the root of worldliness? Self! We can overcome the self-life through faith, trusting Christ to give us a moment-by-moment victory in Him.

If you seem to be defeated constantly, it may be that you have never been born of God. You may think you are a Christian. You may even act like one in many respects; but keep in mind, to be a child of God there must be the miracle of the new birth in the heart. If there is no miracle, there is no life. If there is no life, there is no victory.

Several years ago a renowned surgeon died in England. He had been greatly admired and respected by his fellowmen for his knowledge and skill.

"He was a very great surgeon," said one who had worked under him in the hospital. Yet this surgeon, who had such control of himself when operating on a human body, had no control over his own body. He was a slave to the lusts of the flesh; and at last, tired and weary of living a life of defeat, he ended his life in a tragic manner. Here was a man with tremendous human resources, but they were of no avail in satisfying the emptiness of his heart. Above all else, he needed the new birth. He was a giant before men but a helpless weakling before God. His

great need was Christ.

It may be that your greatest need at this moment is Jesus Christ. Do not miss God's best. It may also be possible that right now you are in the same circumstances in which we have seen Jonah—stripped of everything but the eye of faith. Thus he remembered the Lord and turned wholly from the idol of self, to Him who is the conqueror of self. Will you do the same and enter into the abundant, fruitful life of victory in Christ?

10

THE DEDICATION

“But I will sacrifice unto Thee with the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay that that I have vowed. Salvation is of the Lord.” (Jonah 2:9)

REPENTING OF HIS SIN, Jonah made his decision to turn again to the Lord. Next we saw his denunciation of worthless idols, especially the most pernicious idol of all—self. Now may we consider the prophet's complete dedication. His experience is genuine in every detail.

“I will sacrifice,” he declares, “unto Thee with the voice of thanksgiving.” There is no bitterness or resentment in his heart. He approaches the Lord with the voice of thanksgiving, without question as to why he had to suffer so. Doubtless he knew the answer to that. He must have felt much like David, who wrote in Psalm 119:67, “Before I was afflicted I went astray: but now have I kept Thy word.” Jonah is grateful for his affliction because of its result in his life. Thus he comes before the Lord with thanksgiving. Surely the heart of God was made glad, for He declares in Psalm 50:23, “Whoso offereth praise glorifieth Me.”

Ever since Jonah had turned from his call to Nineveh, he had been living for himself. Now, though he is imprisoned in the belly of the fish, his heart is turned toward Nineveh. The words, “I will sacrifice,” provide a clue to his inward ambitions. Dominated by self, he was in no position to go to Nineveh; but now having claimed victory over the self-life, he is a ready servant, determined to sacrifice for God.

Repeatedly, throughout the Scriptures, the Lord emphasizes the importance of sacrifice for those who would faithfully serve Him. In Psalm 54:6 David confessed, “I will freely sacrifice unto Thee: I will praise Thy name, O Lord; for it is good.” Nothing is more pleasing to the ear of God than the confession of the sincere, believing heart of a willingness to sacrifice. For this reason the Apostle Paul pleads with us to present our “bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God,” which he declares to be our “reasonable service” (Romans 12: 1). Indeed, it is reasonable. Christ sacrificed His life for our sins. Should we not be willing to sacrifice ourselves and our possessions for Him? But, how few of us have entered into the blessedness of sacrificial living for the Lord Jesus!

“I can't get interested in missions,” exclaimed a young girl as she left a thrilling missionary meeting in the company of an older woman believer.

“No, dear,” came the pitying response, “it isn't to be expected that you should. You see, it's just like getting interest in a bank. You must put something in first; and the more you put in, the more interest you get out.” Time, money, or praying—it does not matter which; you must put something in or you will never have any

interest.

Could it not be said that few of us have any real zeal for the Lord and the things that concern Him because we have made such a poor investment of ourselves for Him? We have lived for the flesh and the things that satisfy the flesh. We have busied ourselves with the comforts of life and overlooked the fact that millions are perishing without a Saviour. The only way they will ever be reached is through sacrifice on the part of God's people. When we denounce our claim to the idols that have turned our eyes from the Lord Jesus and offer ourselves and all that He has entrusted to us as a sacrifice for His glory, then and only then will the spiritually hungry and destitute be fed with the Bread of Life.

The Apostle Paul declared in Galatians 6:17, "I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus." Doubtless his body was scarred from head to toe as the result of the abuse he received from the hands of many who spurned his bold proclamation of the gospel. Perhaps you recall the incident in Lystra when he was stoned. Following this, his persecutors dragged him out of the city and threw him on the ground, supposing him to be dead. Soon, however, he revived—and where did he go? Right back into Lystra, ready and willing to sacrifice his life, that those who abused him might come to know Christ. Shortly after that, in providing encouragement for a little body of fellow believers, he said, "We must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22). Never was this dauntless hero of the faith deterred by tribulations. He kept pressing earnestly "toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3: 14). His was a life of complete sacrifice for God. Every scar on his body was a badge of sacrifice.

Though few of us seem to know much about the real meaning of sacrifice in personal experience, the Church of Christ is not without its unflinching and stalwart witnesses who are sacrificing for the Lord. Some time ago, while speaking at the Ben Lippen Bible conference, I was greatly moved one evening as I listened to a missionary speaker, Mr. Elmer Thompson of the West Indies Mission. He told of an engaged couple who came to his mission board desirous of going to Haiti as missionaries. If accepted by the mission board, the two young people hoped to be married and then go to the field. They submitted to certain routine tests in determining their fitness for missionary work, and it was discovered that the young lady was in poor health, unable to pass her physical examination. The mission board agreed that the young lady should not go to the field for at least a year, and discussed the matter with the couple.

"Suppose I go out to the field for a year," the young man said, "then can she come down and may we be married?" The board realized that there was a catch in that. The girl's health might be worse at the end of the year.

"Let us leave it this way," said the chairman of the board, "if she is no better physically within a year, either you must resign your work voluntarily and come home or break your engagement and stay on the field." This was acceptable to all concerned, and shortly afterward the young man left the girl he loved to teach in the Haiti Bible Institute.

The year passed and the girl was given another physical. To her amazement, it was discovered that her condition was worse. With much regret on the part of the mission board, the young man was informed and urged to make his decision. For a number of days he walked the campus of the Haiti Bible Institute, perplexed and bewildered. Finally, after a great struggle of soul, having wrestled with God in prayer for many hours, he was led to his decision: "God put me here. I cannot leave Haiti."

Sacrifice! What do you and I know about sacrifice for God? When we hear of the way some of God's dear saints throughout the world are paying the price, offering up "spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 2: 5), how much we need to learn about this important subject. Most of our church people seem interested in their own welfare and comforts, forgetful of the fact that, if the perishing millions are to be reached for Christ, all who name His name must sacrifice.

It is alarming how many believers at home expect missionaries to do all the sacrificing. They take it for granted that while the missionaries go to the field and live with bare necessities and few comforts, those at home may splurge in their abundance.

Several years ago I spoke at a missionary conference and sought to present some of the needs of God's servants out on the fields afar. After the service one of the successful businessmen in this wealthy congregation came to me and said, "Missionaries have it too easy these days. They have almost as many comforts as we have."

Why shouldn't they have some comforts? These faithful, obedient servants of the Lord have heard His voice and responded. They have left parents, friends, and in many cases temporal security, in offering themselves as living sacrifices to proclaim Christ. Sacrifice is not for missionaries alone. It is for all who have made an honest and sincere decision to follow the Lord. In fact, the evidence of one's full commitment to the Lord is sacrificial living. That is why I believe Jonah's decision in verse 4 was genuine. He said, "I will look again toward Thy holy temple." But that is not all; he further said, "I will sacrifice unto Thee with the voice of thanksgiving." The second statement proves the sincerity of the first.

Next the prophet says, "I will pay that that I have vowed." Doubtless at some time before his disobedient flight from the presence of the Lord, Jonah had vowed to God that he would obey Him at any cost. But when the word of the Lord came to the prophet, he broke his vow. Such a thing is extremely dangerous, for God will always hold us accountable for any vow we make to Him. The Scripture is clear on this point, "When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for He hath no pleasure in fools: pay that which thou hast vowed. Better is it that thou shouldest not vow, than that thou shouldest vow and not pay" (Ecclesiastes 5:4-5). In other words, though it is good not to make a vow if we do not fulfill the vow, it is far better to make a vow before God and keep it.

The Lord always blesses the obedient life. In fact, this is the only life He promises to bless. In Deuteronomy 11:26-28 God says, "Behold, I set before you this day a blessing and a curse; A blessing, if ye obey the commandments of the Lord your God, which I command you this day: And a curse, if ye will not obey the commandments of the Lord your God, but turn aside out of the way which I command you this day, to go after other gods, which ye have not known." Obedience produces blessing, while disobedience results in a curse. Are you living under the blessing of God or under a curse? For many days Jonah had been living under a curse, but, praise God, as we see him now, he is back under the blessing. He made his decision, he denounced his idols, and now he offers himself to the Lord in unrestrained dedication.

The Lord we profess to love and follow, who saved us from sin and shame, is the personification of obedience. It was His obedience that took Him to the cross: "He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross" (Philippians 2:8). To counteract Adam's disobedience, He gave Himself for you and for me: "For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous" (Romans 5: 19). If we love Him who is known for His obedience, is it not obligatory that we follow Him in a life of willing and faithful obedience? Parents expect their children to obey; school teachers expect their pupils to obey; employers expect their employees to obey; is it not normal and right to expect the subjects of a loving God to obey Him?

The story is told of the Rothschilds, the most famous family of financiers in the world, illustrating the strict obedience which they at all times exacted from their employees. They once had an agent in New Orleans, a young and alert fellow, who kept his eyes and ears open. They wired him to sell their cotton holdings on a specified day. Believing that he had better information on the local market than his employers, he held the sale over four days and netted an extra profit of \$40,000. He proudly notified the Rothschilds of his achievement and forwarded the bonus. The Rothschilds returned the amount intact, with a cold note that read: "The \$40,000 you made by

disobeying our instructions is not ours but yours. Take it! Your successor sails for New Orleans today.”

If the business world is so concerned about obedience, how much more God must be. And indeed, He is! He says in Jeremiah 7:23, “But this thing commanded I them, saying, Obey My voice, and I will be your God, and ye shall be My people: and walk ye in all the ways that I have commanded you, that it may be well unto you.”

Are you walking “in all the ways” that God hath commanded you? Are you paying the vows you have made to the Lord? Are you His obedient child? If so, you are in fellowship with Him, enjoying His daily outpouring of abundant blessing. If not, you are miserable and wretched. Even though you may have all the comforts anyone could want, somehow there is unrest and insecurity in your heart. What is this but the result of disobedience—disobedience to former vows? You have wandered, you have drifted from God’s plan for your life. Oh, come back! Do not wait! Do not trudge through another day of grief! Look again to the Lord! Turn from the self-life and declare to the God who has never forsaken you, “I will sacrifice unto Thee with the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay that that I have vowed.”

Jonah learned many important lessons in his calamity; one was that “Salvation is of the Lord.” Salvation as it is used here could also be translated “deliverance.” Jonah had sought to escape his responsibility, but instead of peace he found turmoil. Now he has entered once again into God’s wonderful peace. He has found deliverance from fear, rebellion, and obstinacy.

Indeed, the Lord is the only One who can give this deliverance. The prophet Jeremiah declared, “O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps” (Jeremiah 10:23). Likewise, David said, “Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth” (Psalm 124:8). What is your need? Deliverance awaits you if you will turn to the Deliverer. Apart from Him there is no deliverance. If you look to yourself, you will fail. If you look to man, you will be disappointed. But if you look to the Lord, you will rejoice.

It is very possible that you know all that I am saying. In fact, you may believe it with your whole heart. You have one thing yet to do—submit to Christ’s control. You know what to do but you have not responded to Him. For some reason, there is rebellion in your heart. To you God says, “If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them” (John 13:17).

One time I was speaking on the campus of a well-known Christian school. In one of my messages I made an appeal for those present to offer themselves to God for the mission-field. At the close of the service a fine-appearing young fellow approached me and said, “I am not willing to go to the mission field.”

“Why not?” I asked.

“If I stay home after my schooling,” he replied, “I will have everything at my fingertips. My Father is a successful businessman, and soon he hopes to turn the entire business over to me.”

“God could snatch that business away from you in a matter of minutes,” I said to that young man. “Do not trust in a business. Trust in the Lord! I suggest that you pray this prayer regarding the mission field, ‘Lord, make me willing to be willing.’”

This young man said he was a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. He gave testimony to the fact that he had made his decision to receive the Lord into his heart. But it is quite clear from what he told me that he is like many I have met along the way who were far more concerned about their own plans than God’s plans. Do not make this mistake. Let the Lord have His perfect way in your life. Make your vow of dedication before the Lord, and then each day ask for grace to obey and to fulfill the vow you have made. Follow the Lord, obey and honor Him, and life will overflow with His marvelous grace and mercy.

Sometimes rebellion in the heart is an evidence of the need of Christ in the life. One may think himself to be a child of God, when in reality the very fact that he refuses to do the will of God suggests a lack of a genuine

heart conversion. This could be true of you. The Bible says, “Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves” (2 Corinthians 13: 5). It is well not only to examine yourself but to ask God to examine your heart as David did, “Examine me, O Lord, and prove me; try my reins and my heart” (Psalm 26:2). Are you a child of God? Go before the Lord! Let Him examine your heart! If you have truly believed on Christ, God will give you the blessed assurance that you belong to Him.

11

THE DIRECTION

“And the Lord spake unto the fish, and it vomited out Jonah upon the dry land. And the word of the Lord came unto Jonah the second time, saying, Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee” (Jonah 2:10-3 :2).

AFTER SUFFERING from the miseries of disobedience, Jonah made a complete dedication of himself to the Lord, declaring, “I will sacrifice unto Thee with the voice of thanksgiving. I will pay that that I have vowed.” Here the prophet states his willingness to obey the Lord. Now, the test comes: will he obey God actually and in reality? Again, God gives the direction to Jonah to go to Nineveh and perform the task he should have fulfilled long ago.

Before the restatement of Jonah’s commission, the Lord spake and the direction was given to the fish, “and it vomited out Jonah upon the dry land.” By a divine means of communication, the Lord informed the great fish that his mission was accomplished and that he should deposit Jonah on a certain shore. Immediately, the mighty monster of the sea responded. The Lord needed to speak only once and the fish obeyed instantly. How unlike Jonah! Even worse, how unlike you and me. Have there not been many times when the Lord spoke once, yea, twice, and even many more times, and we turned a deaf ear to His voice? We would naturally classify the fish in the category of a dumb animal, but considering his prompt obedience to God, it is obvious that he was not dumb at all.

Though we are not told in the text, it would seem that Jonah must have landed on the shore near Joppa. In his foolish and vain attempt to escape God’s will for his life, Jonah paid the fare for his trip to Tarshish; but after his repentance and submission to the Lord, we notice that God gave His servant a speedy return with free transportation. Is it not true that the price of sin is always costly, but the best things in life are God’s gifts, which are usually free? “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning” (James 1:17). Of course, the greatest of these gifts is salvation. Though it was extremely costly to God in the offering up of His dear Son on the cross, it is free to us on the basis of repentance and faith, in receiving Christ as Saviour and Lord.

Can you imagine Jonah’s surprise in suddenly being discharged from the fish’s mouth and deposited on the shore? Doubtless he stood to his feet, brushed off the seaweed, washed, looked all around, and then, after taking several deep breaths of fresh air, simply bowed his head and said, “Thank you, Lord.” Then, too, with a heart overflowing with gratitude, he must have realized more than ever how much better it is to walk in the Lord’s chosen paths than the way of the flesh. All of us who have tried other ways will agree that God’s way is the best. David said in Psalm 37:23, “The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord, and He delighteth in his way.”

It was while Jonah was standing on the seashore in silent meditation that “the word of the Lord came unto Jonah the second time.” Someone has described this as the “gospel of the second chance.” This does not mean that there is a second chance to be saved after death, but rather a new opportunity to be fruitful for God in this present life, even though a believer may have been disobedient and unfruitful. God not only forgives, when one confesses failure, but forgets past acts of failure, and allows one to start over again. Of course, valuable time is lost and much blessing is missed, but the mercy of the Lord provides another avenue of service and fruitfulness.

In part, the call is the same that was originally given to Jonah, “Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city.” Basically, the call of God to His people has always been the same— GO! We are never to stay, but always to go and keep going for God. The world needs to hear the message of life. God’s plan is that His people should go “into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15). So many who name the name of Christ are not going today. They are occupied with the things that concern themselves rather than those that concern the salvation of the lost. God says of the unsaved that “the redemption of their soul is precious” (Psalm 49:8). We seem to have overlooked the value God has placed upon lost souls. Oh, if only we could sense the worth of human souls, we would spend more time and invest more money in reaching them for Christ.

Because the majority of Christians are not going into all the world to preach the gospel, the burden of this tremendous responsibility seems to fall on a few. Several years ago, I was greatly moved as I read of Dr. Alma Cooke, who had completed thirty years as a missionary doctor in China. After these years of faithful service, she returned to Boston, Massachusetts, planning for retirement at the age of seventy. Then she heard that missionary doctors were sorely needed in West Africa. There were so few in this country who were willing to respond to this call, that it was a matter only of several months before Dr. Cooke was on her way to begin her “retirement” by extending her healing ministry to the people of Africa.

Those of us who are active for the Lord realize that without question God has His loyal servants scattered all around the world. Many of them are doing the jobs of two or three people because so few Christians are doing what God has called them to do. How important it is for everyone to examine his own heart by asking, “Am I fulfilling the will of God for my life in doing my best to reach the lost for Jesus Christ?”

We must act now. This great task of evangelism cannot wait. All of us would do well to heed the words of Paul in Romans 13:11-12: “And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light.” Yes, it is close to the midnight hour. May God help us to rise up and put on the armor of light, that we might hurry out to the fields of sin to proclaim the glorious message of Christ and His love for the lost. We cannot afford to delay. It is already too late in many parts of the world. In John 4:35 our Lord reminds us of the urgency of this task as He says, “Say not ye, There are yet four months, and then cometh the harvest? Behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest.”

I do not know where God wants you to serve Him, but I do know that He wants you to serve Him. Argue with Him if you like. Try to convince Him about the circumstances at home, or your business, or your health. He will not be satisfied, for He has told us to go into all the world and proclaim the gospel. This does not mean, of course, that every Christian is to be a missionary in a far-off country. It does mean that every Christian is to be a missionary in that he should be pointing the lost to Christ. Let us be sure, whenever we are in the presence of one lost soul, we are on a mission field. We are to be missionaries wherever we are. God says in 2 Corinthians 5 :20, “We are ambassadors for Christ.” This is every believer’s responsibility and task.

Though we are not all called to go to a foreign field, we must not treat foreign missionary service lightly. Some of our young people have said, “I will stay home and make money and send missionaries.” I have met

people up in years who told God this when they were young, but though they made the money, they failed to send the missionaries. Every young person who is a Christian ought to pray and seek God's will about going to the foreign field. If for some reason the Lord wants you to stay at home, He will make it clear. But I believe our first call is to go to those who have not heard the gospel time and time again, such as many have who live in our country. We are to go to those who have never heard the gospel, that they might have the privilege of hearing the truth of God at least once.

It may be that God has been speaking to your heart about this matter. You have felt a definite leading from the Lord to forsake all, to give your life to be a missionary in some needy and destitute land where there is little or no witness for Christ. You know many reasons why you should not go. In fact, from the human standpoint it would be very unreasonable for you to go. If God is calling you, you may be sure that He will undertake for every obstacle. Do not argue with the Lord. If He has told you to go, do your best to respond as quickly as possible. Let nothing deter you from this divine commission.

Some years ago Hudson Taylor was speaking in Glasgow, Scotland. At the conclusion of the service, a man came to the platform, hobbling on a wooden leg and a crutch. He introduced himself to Mr. Taylor, then said, "God has called me to China." Mr. Taylor glanced down at the wooden leg and then at the crutch and said, "Why, you can't go to China in this condition." The cripple seemed awfully discouraged, but with a kindly smile he shook Mr. Taylor's hand and bid him good-bye.

Some months passed and Hudson Taylor was invited back to speak in the same city. After the meeting, the same cripple appeared, to speak to Mr. Taylor again.

"God has spoken to me," said the determined believer, "and told me I must be a missionary and go to China."

"Is that so?" Mr. Taylor replied with surprise. "Tell me, what did He say?"

The cripple quoted from Isaiah 33:23, "The lame take the prey." Mr. Taylor, who was well known for his sense of humor, smiled and said, "Well, my good man, you are lame and there is plenty of prey; so you may go to China."

Shortly after, John Stott sailed for China, where he went about, hobbling on his wooden leg and helping himself along with a crutch. While on the boat going to the field, someone observing his physical handicap and knowing of his intentions asked, "Why are you going to China to be a missionary in that condition?"

"Well," he replied, "I don't see many two-legged people going, so I am going with my one leg."

When he reached his destination in China, the people were afraid to let him into the city. They described him as a funny-looking creature with bushy hair, a long nose, and three legs. They feared that, if they permitted him to come into the city, legions of demons would enter with him. Little did they realize that just the opposite would be the case. When John Stott finally entered the city, legions of angels came with him. He went to work going from door to door, telling people about Christ. At some of the places where he went the people slammed the door in his face, but he soon learned that he could put his wooden leg in before they got a chance to shut the door, and then they had to listen. God, blessed John Stott in China. No one could begin to number the souls that came to know Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord because of the faithful witness of this humble, handicapped servant of Christ. John Stott had a call from God. He had numerous reasons to believe that he should not go to China, but he responded by faith to the voice of God.

Could it be that you have had a definite call from the Lord. to serve Him, but like Jonah of old you have fled in the opposite direction? Have you wandered far from God's will for your life and been living in disobedience? Possibly at this moment the Lord's call is being given to you for the second time, or the third, or the fourth. Do not ignore it! Submit to the Lord! Tell God that you are willing to do whatever He wants you to do,

irrespective of the cost. Like Jonah, return to the place where you forsook the will of God. Begin all over again. Submit to the Lord's control. Forsake your life of carnality and fruitlessness. Heed God's voice afresh, "Come ye after Me, and I will make you to become fishers of men" (Mark 1: 17). It may be too late to enjoy God's first best, but do not miss His second best. Possibly there is not much of you left to give to God. Be sure, however, He will receive whatever you will offer Him. Delay no longer!

In the original call given to Jonah, in which He was told to go to Nineveh, the Lord expressly stated that the prophet should cry against the wicked city. In the second call, God told Jonah to go and "preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee." There is a strong implication here that Jonah is reminded that he must keep close to the Lord, that he should be careful to listen to God's voice, and be quick to speak the divine truth. In his first call, Jonah was not warned in this manner. Was it a case of God's discovering what Jonah was like, and having seen his disobedience, changed His attitude toward Jonah? No, it was not that at all. God knew what Jonah was like all the time. The fact is that finally Jonah found himself out. Jonah had to discover his frailties—not God. Thus Jonah is warned to stay close to the Lord and faithfully to proclaim the Word.

This is a worth-while warning for every servant of the Lord. How we need to take these words to heart, "Preach the preaching that I bid thee." Would to God that every minister of the gospel were preaching to the congregation Of his "Nineveh" the preaching that the Lord bids him preach. Hearts are hungry for the Word of the living God; but, regrettably, many congregations are hearing only the eloquence of dying men. Paul declared, "I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you" (1 Corinthians 11:23). He further said, "Woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel" (1 Corinthians 9: 16).

A preacher visiting a penitentiary one Saturday was invited by the Christian warden to speak to the inmates the next day. That evening the preacher felt impressed to go to the penitentiary and learn the details regarding the service. Noting two chairs draped in black in the main assembly room, he inquired as to the reason. Said the warden, "These two chairs are draped for death. Your sermon will be the last some of these men will ever hear."

No preacher or Christian worker ever knows when some of the seats before him are draped with death. It is for this reason that he must proclaim the glorious gospel of salvation through the Son of God. This is the message of hope and assurance. Only the glorious truth of salvation through the blood of Jesus Christ can transform hearts.

Since this is the message the servant of the Lord must faithfully proclaim, it is also the truth that the unsaved must believe. The Lord Jesus declared in John 3:36, "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him." Have you really believed on the Son, or are you trusting in your own ability for salvation? There is no other way to Heaven than the God-prepared way. Should it be that you have never sincerely received Christ into your heart, will you do so immediately? Then after you receive Christ, let God lead you on into a life of fruitfulness for Him.

12

THE DESTINATION

"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" (Jonah 3:3).

AFTER JONAH'S COMPLETE dedication to the Lord, the direction is given to him the second time to arise and go unto Nineveh. What the prophet does at this juncture will test the sincerity of his dedication. Doubtless his dedication was real, for now we see him striking out for his destination—"So Jonah arose, and went unto Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord." The prophet had been a long time coming to this place of obedience, but, praise God, he claimed victory and was made ready to embark on a new path of blessing and usefulness.

In response to his original call, which God had given, Jonah "rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the Lord." When the call came the second time, Jonah "arose, and went unto Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord." Whenever God's servant refuses to obey the Word of the Lord, he will soon find himself fleeing "from the presence of the Lord." Nothing could prove more tragic for the believer. Disobedience can result only in unhappiness and misery. He who would try to live in disobedience to the Word of God, and yet claim to be a Christian, will soon fail heir to sorrow and regret. The Bible teaches that God's blessing can be experienced only as we yield to Him in strict obedience to His Word. That is why the apostle says in James 1:22, "Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves."

After following Jonah step by step in his deliberate and willful disobedience to the Word of God, how thrilling it is to read that, upon receiving his second call to go unto Nineveh, he arose, and went.

It might be well for all of us to pause briefly and consider again the theme of our studies, "living obediently." Shall we ask ourselves, "Am I doing all that God has called me to do?" Repeatedly I have tried to make it clear that every believer in Jesus Christ has a call from God to "go." Surely there can be no misunderstanding. Go means only one thing. There are some words in the Bible that have more than one connotation, but it is certain that we can draw only one implication from the word go. We cannot possibly escape its impact.

A young man had returned home for the Christmas holidays after his first few months in college. The family had a most enjoyable time around the dinner table as the son related numerous incidents he had experienced during his first semester. Since his folks were not too well educated, he sought to impress them with his achievement in vocabulary after such a short time at school.

"I want to tell you an interesting narrative," he said.

"Narrative," replied his mother, "what is that?"

"Oh," he said, "don't you know, that's a tale about something." Later in the evening when it came time to go to bed, the boy chose to sit up and read awhile. The mother said to him, "Now when you come up, don't forget to put out the light."

"Mother," he said, "don't say, 'Put out the light,' say, 'Extinguish the light.'" With no further comments, but with many thoughts, the boy's mother went on upstairs. But just before climbing into bed she thought of one more chore she had overlooked. "Before you come to bed," she shouted down to her son, "please take the cat by the narrative and extinguish it."

Go infers only one thing. We who have received Christ into our hearts have no choice in the matter. Go does not mean "stay." The Lord Jesus declared in John 17:18, "As Thou hast sent Me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world." Why did He come into the world, to satisfy His own interests, to be comfortable and live for Himself? He came to give "Himself a ransom for all" (1 Timothy 2:6). He came not to take, but to give. We have been saved for the same purpose. We are to live not for ourselves, but for Him—to tell others about Him. "Ye are my witnesses, saith the Lord" (Isaiah 43: 12). In Jeremiah 23:28 God says, "He that hath My word, let him speak My word faithfully." Oh, that all the Lord's people might sense the importance of this tremendous responsibility that is ours to evangelize the world for Jesus Christ.

One time I heard a story about the dear old Christian woman in a foreign land who, though she loved the

Lord with all her heart, refused to join church. When the missionary asked why, she said that there was one commandment in the Bible she could not obey, and as long as she could not obey this commandment she did not feel that she could be a worthy church member. After asking a few more questions, the missionary discovered that this sincere saint of God refused to join church because she had read Mark 16:15 and felt that she could not go into all the world and preach the gospel because of her physical handicap. She was afflicted with rheumatism and could only hobble about slowly. Realizing that she could not do as our Lord commanded, to go to everyone with the gospel, she surmised that she could not be a good church member. She had bravely and boldly witnessed to her relatives and friends, but she felt that this was not enough.

How simply this woman apprehended the words of Christ to His disciples to go! Have we done as much about this command? Of course, many of us cannot arise and go to the mission field. Some of us are too old, in addition to the fact that there are legitimate reasons why we should not go to the foreign field. But, on the other hand, what about our youth? I am convinced that every young man and young woman who has received Jesus Christ into his or her heart ought to try the door to the mission field. Multitudes have not. They are like Jonah, fleeing from the presence of the Lord; but God is looking for men and women today who will arise and go, as Jonah finally arose and went to Nineveh.

A brother in Christ had been conducting a missionary conference. On the closing night, one of the men of the church said to the speaker, "I have enjoyed the meetings this week, but I am sorry you came." Upon seeing the look of surprise on the speaker's face, the man continued: "These meetings this week have reminded me afresh that I have missed God's best for my life. I was once called to Africa. I thought I should earn enough money to take care of my passage and outfit. It seemed so much easier to do that than to depend on others to help; so I stayed and entered business. I own that business today. I have everything money can give. I have a beautiful home, a lovely wife and family. In our home we have everything that money can bring, but down in my heart there is a great void. There is an emptiness, and you have reminded me all through this week that I have missed God's best. My life has been a failure, not from the standpoint of the world; but I know now as I have never known before that as I stand before God one day I shall look back and know that my life has been a failure."

Believer in Jesus Christ, there are many failures like this man in our churches today. Do not be a failure before God. Seek out His will for your life. Determine in the light of His guidance where He would have you be His missionary. Do you want to know God's will? Dedicate yourself completely to Him as Jonah ultimately did, and immediately the direction will be given. In Psalm 25: 14 David declared, "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him." If you surrender your heart and life to God, the Lord will reveal His plan to you for your future.

It may be that you are saying, "I am willing to go, but I don't have what it takes to be a missionary." Let God care for that. If the Lord calls you, He will equip you. He never assigns a task without providing every essential. He called Moses to deliver His people from their Egyptian bondage. Looking at himself, Moses knew he was not capable of such a thing, so he cried out to God, "Who am I, that I should go unto Pharaoh, and that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt?" (Exodus 3:11). What was God's response? "Certainly I will be with thee" (Exodus 3: 12). Was anything else needed? Did Moses need anything more than the Lord? Are we any different? If you have the Lord in your heart and God has called you to do a certain task, you may be sure every need will be met.

God called Jeremiah to be "a prophet unto the nations" (Jeremiah 1:5). The youthful servant of the Lord began to proffer excuses, "Ah, Lord God! behold, I cannot speak: for I am a child." God is never satisfied with excuses, so He replied, "Say not, I am a child: for thou shalt go to all that I shall send thee, and whatsoever I command thee thou shalt speak. Be not afraid of their faces: for I am with thee to deliver thee, saith the Lord" (Jeremiah 1:7-8). God gave Moses and Jeremiah the same promise He gives every surrendered heart at this

moment, "I am with thee." There may be many obstacles in your path, but if God is with you, He will remove them all. Do not come to the Lord with your shallow excuses: you cannot speak, you are not physically able, you must support your parents—and many other apologies that are meaningless to a miracle-working God. If the Lord has laid His hand upon you, He will care for every detail. Most of all, He wants willing hearts and obedient lives. If He has these, the result will be the salvation of precious souls.

But what about those of us who cannot go to the mission field? Are we excused from the responsibility of world-wide evangelization? Decidedly not! There are other ways we can go. One way common to all of us is the path of prayer. We have the privilege of interceding daily for God's servants who have gone. And at the same time, we should pray to "the Lord of the harvest, that He will send forth labourers into His harvest" (Matthew 9:38). The ministry of intercession is of extreme importance. Not only must we pray that the Lord will call our youth to go to the fields afar, but we must pray that the Lord will sustain them amidst the attacks of the wicked one out on the field. I believe faithful prayer warriors at home will be equally rewarded by the Lord with those who have carried the gospel out to the far-off lands.

Some years ago a great missionary statesman spoke at a youth conference. At the conclusion of his address, he gave an appeal for young people to offer their lives for full-time missionary service. The response was tremendous. One of the young men who went forward had a brother seated on the back pew, badly crippled, able only to hobble about on crutches. The cripple sat with head bowed while his brother and many other young people went forward to offer themselves for the mission field. Before the invitation was finished, the crippled boy wrote a little note. Handing it to an usher, he asked that it be given to the speaker. The speaker opened it and read it, and then with tear-filled eyes he read it aloud: "I cannot go to the mission field, but I will give myself to prayer for those who do go." To this day, that man spends three to four hours daily interceding not only for his brother out on the field, but for missionaries all around the world.

There is another way all of us can go. We can go with the money the Lord has entrusted to us, which we should be using as stewards of God. The sorrowful fact that we have failed to evangelize the world after two thousand years proves that our giving is just about as poor as our going. We spend a billion and a half dollars annually on church buildings in America (and in many instances I fear this is for mere religious entertainment), while only two per cent of that sum goes to spread the gospel of Christ among the heathen. We give on the average of one-tenth of a cent a day toward missions, demonstrating the fact that we place no more value upon the souls for whom Christ died than a fraction of a penny per day. Our stinginess is withholding the opportunity from men who have a right to hear, who deserve an answer to the question, "Does God love me?"

I am told that the drinker spends an average of two hundred dollars a year on alcohol. Surely a Christian should spend at least as much each year for world-wide evangelization as the drinker spends on alcohol. On this basis, a church with a membership of five hundred ought to contribute at least one hundred thousand dollars a year to missions; or it means that the drinker loves drink more than Christians love Christ.

I am also told that one who smokes usually spends a hundred dollars a year for tobacco. Here is another fifty thousand dollars the church of five hundred members ought to be giving to missions, or it means that the smoker thinks more of tobacco than Christians think of Christ. Every dollar spent for tobacco goes up in smoke. Every dollar spent for alcohol helps to ruin lives. But every dollar invested in the promotion of the gospel of Jesus Christ at home and abroad helps to save precious souls. Could investments be wiser or more lasting? It is for this reason that God says in Deuteronomy 16:17, "Every man shall give as he is able, according to the blessing of the Lord thy God which He hath given thee."

God has been good to all of us. He has showered us with spiritual, physical and material blessings; but what have we done? In most cases, we have kept them for ourselves. He never intended that we should be selfish

with His gifts. We are to use everything He pours upon us as a means to hasten the gospel to those who have never heard.

Jonah “arose and went unto Nineveh.” I am sure he was never happier or more blessed of God than when he was heading in the direction of his divinely-chosen destination. You and I will never find more peace, nor greater joy, than when we resign ourselves to obey God’s holy call to reach the lost for Christ. Oh, child of God, hear His voice, respond to His call, send the message of life to the dying millions.

We are told next that “Nineveh was an exceeding great city of three days’ journey.” This gives some suggestion as to magnitude and importance of this capital city. “Three days’ journey” probably means that it would have taken Jonah at least three days to go through all the streets and lanes proclaiming the message God gave him. “Great city,” as used here, means literally “a city great to God.” It was not the magnificent architecture or the exquisite beauty of the city that made it great to God, but rather the thousands of human souls that needed the message of life.

It is for this same reason that all cities are great to God. The Lord is not moved by the achievements of man, but He is disturbed by the emptiness of human hearts. He is “not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9). Because of the importance and worth of human souls, God says to every true believer: “If thou draw out thy soul to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted soul; then shall thy light rise in obscurity, and thy darkness be as the noon day: And the Lord shall guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought, and make fat thy bones: and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not” (Isaiah 58:10-11). Here is a promise of blessing and prosperity for those of the people of God who will give themselves to the winning of lost souls to Jesus Christ. Further, in Proverbs 11:30 God says, “The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life; and he that winneth souls is wise.

For what purpose are you living, child of God? Are you living to win men to Christ, or are you living simply for a few comforts for the flesh? We have our commission. God has given us the destination. The world needs to be reached with the gospel. We must arise and go before it is too late. What about you? Are you doing your best through the power given by the living Christ?

Maybe you are not going because you have never been reached yourself. You may have the gospel in your head but it has never reached your heart. Why not turn to Christ now? Remember, before He says, “go,” He says, “come.” His word to you is, “Come; for all things are now ready” (Luke 14: 17). He will receive you and save you if you will come to Him.

13

THE DECLARATION

“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”(Jonah 3:4)

HAVING RESPONDED IMMEDIATELY to his renewed commission in faithful obedience, Jonah reaches his destination. With Spirit-directed fervor and zeal he begins to proclaim his God-given declaration: ”Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown.”

No time was lost by the prophet upon reaching the great city of Nineveh. He did not stop to find a

comfortable inn for rest and refreshment. With fearlessness he went up and down the streets and lanes of the great city of Nineveh shouting God's message of impending doom.

"A day's journey" on foot was about twenty miles. Since Nineveh was a city of three day's journey, it is believed that all the principal streets and lanes of the city would have been a distance of about sixty miles. Thus it would seem that the prophet covered about one-third of the city the first day.

In order to sense something of the difficult assignment Jonah faced, imagine yourself called of God to parade through the streets of your own city, warning the populace with a similar message of coming judgment. Add to this the fact that the Ninevites despised all Jews, and even worse, they were extremely cruel and barbaric, having no respect at all for human life. For hundreds of years they had been known to flay and skin their enemies alive. For a Jew to transgress the bounds of their borders, and to declare that the mighty Ninevites would be overthrown, was a certain means of inviting trouble. Considering some of these things, Jonah's flight to Tarshish becomes much more understandable.

How then do we account for the fact that the same Jonah, who only a short time before was running cowardly from responsibility and God, now appears to be valiant and unafraid, discharging his mission without regard for self? The answer seems to be in his complete dedication to the Lord's control. His eyes were fixed upon God; and as a result, he no longer looked to himself as he had in the past. As we see him in Nineveh, he has one earnest and holy desire above all else: he desires to please the Lord. He has reached God's place of blessing in victory and usefulness.

How few Christians seem to have experienced victory over the self-life. The lack of power in our service for the Lord is evidence of this fact. The believer's body is the temple of the Holy Ghost; yet many fail to yield themselves to God's control. The Lord Jesus bought us with His precious blood, but often self reigns on the throne of His purchased possession. He has given us talents to use for Him, but we have wantonly betrayed our trust. He died to save us from sin, yet we play with evil as a child plays with fire. The power is available always, but the self-life shuts it out.

There is a central citadel at the very heart of man's being where self reigns supreme, and every sin that we commit is the expression of this evil and bitter root of self within. Christ longs to give victory over the self-life, but so often He is not permitted to do so. Is it not true that even after conversion one may merely change from one set of sins to a more respectable set, refusing to deal with the root evil? For example, one may be delivered from the curse of alcohol, having trusted in Jesus Christ for redemption. He boasts of the victory he has received; but at the same time he may become bitter, critical, and jealous in his attitude toward other Christians. Though he has been saved by the power of Christ, he has not yielded himself fully to the lordship of Christ.

J. H. McConkey asked a physician friend one day, "Doctor, what is the exact significance of God's touching Jacob upon the sinew of his thigh?"

"The sinew of the thigh," replied the doctor, "is the strongest in the human body. A horse could scarcely tear it apart."

"Ah, I see," said the preacher, "God has to break us down at the strongest segment of our self-life before He can have His own way of blessing with us."

Mr. McConkey was correct. No man or woman who names the name of Christ will ever be useful for God until he comes to this place of absolute and complete surrender of self to God. Even though we may be Christians and go about attempting to serve Christ, we shall be hopelessly fruitless and useless until we claim the victory over this most destructive and devastating sin of self.

The Lord Jesus informed us in Matthew 16:24 that this is the basic sin we must conquer if we choose to follow Him: "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me." Yet this

is one of the last sins we face; some of us overlook it completely.

Paul was quick to apprehend victory over the self-life. He said, “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me” (Galatians 2:20). He was alive, and yet at the same time he was not alive. How could this be? Self was dead and Christ was living through his surrendered life. The Lord Jesus will live only through those who willingly permit Him to do so. He desires to live through every believer, but many are still selfishly trying to live in their own way. Some are busy serving God, but they are doing what self desires rather than what the Lord wants them to do.

A Christian brother tells about a boyhood experience on the farm. One day his father instructed the boy concerning work he wanted done; The child was not interested in doing that particular kind of work. Thus, after his father left for town, the boy noticed that the barn door needed painting. He knew where there was a can of red paint and a new brush, so he busied himself painting the door. He did a good job, but when his father came home—well, I need not tell the rest, other than to say that the boy was made very unhappy. Though he tried to help his father, he failed to do what his father desired.

There are many serving Christ like that today. They are not doing what God wants them to do; they are busy catering to defeated, selfish flesh. Though He is their Saviour, Christ is not their Lord. He is not their Master. The Lord Jesus said in John 12:26, “If any man serve Me, let him follow Me.” To follow Christ implies that we claim victory over self by yielding our lives fully to His control with a willingness to obey. The glorious result is always fruitful service.

One of the evidences of the unselfish life is the God-implanted love that considers others rather than self. Paul, in speaking of God’s love in 1 Corinthians 13:5, says it “seeketh not her own.” It never does. When our hearts are mastered by the Lord Jesus, self will be obscured and we shall be concerned about others. It was this overwhelming divine love within Jonah’s heart that constrained him to hurry along the narrow, crowded streets of Nineveh, crying aloud God’s warning of judgment. Fearlessly and courageously he witnessed to a desperately needy people. He was no longer the old Jonah, mastered by self; he was a new Jonah, controlled by God.

Why is it that so many believers fail to witness as they should? Often it is because they are afraid of what people might think about them. As the result of selfishness, they are far more concerned about themselves than the needy souls of the lost. If one is truly dead to himself and alive unto Christ, he shall fear no man. Paul says in 2 Timothy 1:7, “God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.” It is the devil who fills our hearts with terror. The Lord promises power, love, and mental equanimity. But He gives these only to those of His own who are empty of self.

Are there not many cowards among the ranks of Christians today who bear no testimony, who have no message for God? They are like Jonah fleeing rather than Jonah witnessing. The Lord Jesus says in Mark 8:38, “Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of Me and of My words in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when He cometh in the glory of His Father with the holy angels.” Are you ashamed of the Lord Jesus Christ? Do you grasp opportunities to speak for the Saviour, faithfully pointing the lost to Him? If so, there is no question about your heart: self is on the cross and Christ is on the throne.

Several years ago I was asked to return to a former pastorate to conduct the funeral service of a man who had attended the church while I was the pastor. The son of the deceased, who had come to Christ during our ministry, met me at the airport. This man is a faithful servant of God, with a sincere burden for souls. Though his father had attended my church, to my knowledge he had never made a profession of faith.

While driving along the highway from the airport to the funeral home, the son told me of the joyful privilege that had been his several months before in leading his father and mother into a definite experience with

Christ.

“You may speak with confidence in the service,” he said, “and tell them that Dad really knew the Lord.” Thus, during my message I offered the claims of Christ as presented in the gospel, and further told how the deceased and his wife had been guided into a clear-cut assurance of their own salvation.

Following the service, we drove to the cemetery for the burial, then to the home of the deceased, where a large number of relatives had gathered. After meeting most of the guests, I mentioned to the son that it was just about time for me to leave for the airport to go home.

“Before you go,” he said, “please lead in prayer.” Then he asked everyone to sit down right where they were. In a matter of seconds there was quietness. The son stood and said, “Very shortly it will be necessary for Doctor Blair to leave to catch his plane. I have asked him to offer prayer. But first,” he continued, “I feel constrained to unload a burden that is on my heart. I want to be sure that every one of you knows Jesus Christ as your Saviour and Lord. For after all, there is only one way into Heaven, and that is through the Son of God.” He quoted Acts 4:12, “Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.” Then he went on to tell in detail how it had been his blessed experience to lead his father and mother into a definite assurance of salvation. Concluding he said, “I feel constrained to plead with those of you who do not know Christ to come to Him just now. If you would like to receive Him as your Saviour and Lord, I am going to ask you to walk forward and take hold of Doctor Blair’s hand.”

Almost immediately his youngest brother came walking up. He gripped my hand and turning around to his loved ones and friends said, “Many of you people know what my life has been, and right now I am taking my stand for Jesus Christ.” The tears were streaming down his cheeks as he went on to say, “I want to see Pop again, and I am receiving the Lord into my heart.” There were a few long moments of silence. God was speaking. One could easily sense the presence of the Holy Spirit as He convicted men and women of sin. There was no further outward response at the time, but several weeks later another brother, who had been far away from the Lord, went to the oldest son with an earnest desire to get right with God.

I shall never forget my experience in that death-saddened home as I stood behind the stalwart, fearless son who so boldly spoke to his dearest loved ones and friends about Christ. Was he nervous? Certainly he was nervous! Who wouldn’t be? Doubtless there is no place more difficult to speak for the Lord than in a gathering of one’s loved ones, relatives, and friends. But this believer did not hedge or flinch. He boldly exalted Christ. I have known this Christian man for a long time. I am certain that he has claimed victory through Christ over the self-life. This is the secret of his power and usefulness for God.

Oh, what the Holy Spirit could do through each of us if we were willing to die to self and become alive unto the Lord Jesus at this moment. God says to every one of us in Romans 6:11, “Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord.” Dead indeed unto sin? Yes, dead to the abominable sin of self, and gloriously alive unto Christ.

Is there complete victory in your heart today because self has been crucified and Christ is permitted to reign? If so, then speaking and witnessing for Him is no problem. Unashamedly, you are telling forth the message God has given you to carry to the lost.

Let us analyze briefly the message Jonah was proclaiming. Though different in wording, it is not different in content from that which we are to carry to lost and needy men and women today—“Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown.” Do not the forty days suggest God’s abundant mercy that we have seen displayed so vividly throughout the book of Jonah thus far? Nineveh deserved immediate destruction, but in mercy God gives forty more days in which to repent. Here was a final opportunity for an idolatrous and sinful people to turn to God, with the alternative of judgment.

In essence, Jonah's message was the same as the gospel we preach. In mercy, God declares, "Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Romans 10: 13). In the Lord's sight, all men are as guilty of sin as the Ninevites. Every one of us deserves eternal death, but it was the mercy of God that sent Christ to die on the cross to pay the eternal price for sin, that we might have an escape and be eternally saved. For those who turn a deaf ear to the plea of mercy, there remains nothing but judgment: "The soul that sinneth, it shall die" (Ezekiel 18:20). Though God's mercy appears to be endless, yet judgment must come if mercy is refused.

The Lord gave the people of Nineveh forty days. If you have never come to Christ, there is no promise that you will have even forty days. We never know. God may give you forty years. On the other hand, He may give you only forty hours, or even less. This we know: the same Bible that teaches mercy, teaches judgment. If you die without the Lord Jesus, there is no second chance. God's gracious invitation is "Look unto Me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else" (Isaiah 45:22). Possibly the Lord has been speaking to you for months, or even years. You have been hardening your heart against God. Oh, hear His voice, the voice of mercy, pleading with you to come to Him. Do not resist our wonderful Lord. Let Him show you and prove to you what a joy it is to follow Him.

14

THE DISCRETION

"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. 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. 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: 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. Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from His fierce anger, that we perish not?" (Jonah 3:5-9).

With UNFLINCHING BOLDNESS the prophet Jonah had been walking the streets of Nineveh proclaiming his God-given declaration. What was the attitude of the people toward this unheard-of spectacle? Oddly enough, their response evidenced discretion as they acted immediately on the truth they heard. Jonah's message could not have been more disturbing or unpopular—"Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown." Humanly speaking, the prophet might easily have been slain upon his first utterance of such a condemnation. We must keep in mind, however, that this was not a human assignment. God had sent Jonah to the Ninevites. As Jonah shouted aloud the message, the Holy Spirit moved upon hearts: "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." Someone has described this as the "greatest revival in history."

Doubtless hundreds of people followed the fearless prophet up and down the streets, watching him and listening to his message as he repeated it hundreds of times. Can you not visualize men and women running in every direction to tell their loved ones and neighbors of the message of doom? At the same time, there must have been thousands of people all over the city crying aloud to God in humble repentance. A miraculous, heart-crushing

manifestation of the power of God had fallen on a city long known as a stronghold of idolatry and wickedness.

We read that “the people of Nineveh believed God.” A literal rendering of this text would be, “the people of Nineveh believed in God.” One may believe, in the sense of merely accepting the fact of His existence; but to believe in God demands faith and trust in all that God says, as well as a complete commitment to His eternal care. It is quite obvious that even in our present day many so-called religious people believe there is a God, that He is the Creator, and some even go so far as to acknowledge that He has provided salvation. They believe all this, but they have never committed themselves to God’s eternal care by sincerely acknowledging His beloved Son as their Saviour and Lord. When one truly believes on Christ, he believes in God, and the Lord becomes a reality in his life.

Surely Jonah must have been greatly surprised at the reaction of the Ninevites. Probably he went to this city expecting the worst. But is it not true, when we are in God’s will, He provides the best? Doubtless you and I would have felt the same as Jonah. We would not have expected such a thing. Most of us are of such little faith. As Christians, we are told in 2 Corinthians 5:7 to “walk by faith, not by sight.” But how frequently we stumble over our own unbelief. Failing to accept the Word of God at face value, we imagine and conjecture. Overlooking the importance of obeying the voice of God, we become slaves to our own thoughts.

How well this fact was impressed upon me some years ago when my wife and I were invited to spend the evening with a couple who had little regard for the things of the Lord. They were extremely worldly, with no interest in church attendance whatsoever. I recall how we went to that home with reluctance, feeling that there would be no prospect for fellowship or enjoyment. It promised to be nothing more than a wasted evening. As we ate supper with them I was more convinced than ever that we should not have accepted this invitation.

Following the meal the husband invited me into the living room while the ladies went to the kitchen to wash the dishes. As soon as we sat down he said, “You know, there is something about your religion that disturbs me.”

“What is that?” I asked.

“This idea of hell. I can’t see it.” Here was my opportunity, and what an opportunity it was! After the ladies came in, for three solid hours I had the unusual privilege of presenting the entire plan of salvation to this couple. They sat there and listened with extreme interest, anxious to hear more and more about the only One who could provide lasting satisfaction and peace for their empty lives. No situation could have been better prepared. The Spirit of God had opened their hearts to hear the truth.

Little did I realize that the Lord was sending us on a mission that night. My lack of vision and spiritual foresight led me to believe that there was no use spending an evening with these unsaved people who seemingly had no interest in the things of God. How surprised I was to find that their hearts were made ready for the Word of Life.

Jonah’s experience must have been similar. Doubtless he was surprised as he saw people all around him repenting of their sins and turning to God. But should he have been surprised? Is not the salvation of the lost the will of God? Certainly it is! “The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9). God longs for the unsaved to turn to Him. He has made every necessary provision; but He chooses to work through clean instruments, empty of self and sin, obedient to the heavenly call. Those who will go all the way with the Lord, as Jonah did eventually, will see the hand of God in action. How important that each of us permit the Holy Spirit to search out his own heart. Are we obedient children of God? Are we doing what God wants us to do? Let us remember that the requirement for usefulness in the service of the Lord is “a broken and a contrite heart” (Psalm 51:17). If our selfish wills and ambitions are broken before the Lord, the Spirit of God will fill us

and the Lord will use us.

It has been said that it is the message God uses and not the messenger. Thus, extreme care is taken to proclaim a full gospel, while the importance of the clean and yielded life is often overlooked. It seems quite clear that one reason why God sent revival to the Ninevites was that Jonah had experienced a revival in his own heart. He was never better prepared spiritually to proclaim the message of God than he was at the moment when revival fell upon the wicked city of Nineveh.

In Luke 11:30 we read, “For as Jonas was a sign unto the Ninevites, so shall also the Son of man be to this generation.” As mentioned before, the word sign may also be rendered “miracle.” Jonah was a miracle before the eyes of the Ninevites. He did not perform any miracles while in the city; he merely proclaimed the message of God. But his life was a miracle. Surely the Ninevites received word of Jonah’s past. News traveled quickly then as it does now. The people must have heard of the prophet’s experience in the depths of the sea in the living grave of the fish. Now they see him alive, proclaiming God’s message. Obviously they knew all about Jonah’s backsliding and failure to obey, but they see this walking miracle of a man yielded to the Lord’s control. It is apparent that the prophet’s transformed life, as well as his message, made such an impact upon these people that they fell on their faces in humble repentance before the Lord. Thus if God is to use the message, He requires a usable messenger.

The revival at Nineveh is a further reminder of the importance of keeping our eyes fixed upon the Lord Jesus. We are prone to look to men and trust in them, but our complete reliance must be on the Lord for all things. The Psalmist tells us that “It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in man” (Psalm 118:8). Jonah could have reasoned within his heart as he entered the city of Nineveh, “Now I must go about this very carefully. Perhaps if I try to be tactful by winning the confidence of the people first, and then unfold the message of God gradually, I shall have greater success.” Had he taken this attitude, he might have become the king’s chaplain. He might have been respected and revered by the people. He might have been called a good fellow, but the tragic result would have been—no revival. Watering down the message of God never produces anything but sad consequences. Jonah did what God told him to do. He preached the Word, and the Lord honored and blessed it as He always does.

Few of us seem to realize the mighty transforming power we have in the Word of God. In 2 Timothy 2:9 we read, “the word of God is not bound.” Often we have limited the effectiveness of the Word of God by our failure to proclaim it in sincerity and in truth. Think of what God says about His Word in Jeremiah 23:29: “Is not My word like as a fire? saith the Lord; and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?” Indeed, God’s Word is as a mighty fire that could easily sweep across continents, engulfing all within its path, if it were being proclaimed through God-fearing servants in our day. It would be as a mighty hammer, crushing rocklike hearts, convicting of sin and drawing the lost to repentance, if those who say they are followers of Christ would tell out the message of salvation which God has given in His Word. The Lord promises in Isaiah 55:11, “So shall My word be that goeth forth out of My mouth: it shall not return unto Me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.” There are no limits to what could be accomplished in our day if we were faithfully to proclaim the Word of God. For as Paul said in Romans 1:16, concerning the gospel, “It is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth.”

Here is the power of God within our possession that could do for America or any other nation of the world what it did in Jonah’s day for the idolatrous, pagan city of Nineveh. Every believer has a tremendous responsibility.

God has not only committed to us the ministry of reconciliation but also the message of reconciliation. We have the Word of God on our hearts for ourselves, but we have it on our hands for those all around us. When this

Word is held in clean hands and proclaimed by pure lips, the result will be revival, even as it was in the case of Jonah.

Africaner was a Hottentot desperado of Namaqualand. He was such a hardened character that the governor at Capetown had offered five hundred dollars for him, dead or alive. He and his men were the terror of South Africa. When Robert Moffatt went as a missionary to Africaner's tribe, the people at Capetown never expected to see Moffatt again. They warned him that Africaner would use the missionary's skull for a drinking cup. Trusting in God and feeling constrained of the Lord to go to these savages, Robert Moffatt responded to the heavenly vision and went.

His first convert was Africaner. Later Moffatt took him to Capetown with him. When the colonial ruler saw the savage changed into a humble, Christian man, he exclaimed "What a miracle! This is the eighth wonder of the world."

How do we account for such a mighty miracle? There is only one answer—the message and the messenger. Robert Moffatt was a man who had committed himself to the control of God. In obedience to the divine will, he went to these needy people and proclaimed the message of God. The results were miraculous.

What the Lord did for Africaner, He wants to do for millions throughout this world in which we live. But there must be the messenger and the message. God has given us the message: "The word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart" (Hebrews 4:12). We need nothing more than the gospel for our message; but where are the men? Where are the women? Where are those who will pay the price with a yielded heart saying, "By the grace of God I will be the Lord's messenger"?

Our present age does not appear to be any different from the time of Ezekiel. God says in Ezekiel 22:30, "I sought for a man among them, that should make up the hedge, and stand in the gap before Me for the land, that I should not destroy it: but I found none." So often, as God looks down today for those through whom He can work, He finds none. Can He find you waiting and willing to proclaim the message of life according to His will? Is your life fully committed to His control?

I have heard some say, we cannot have revival in our day; the Bible prophesies apostasy and a falling away for the last days. We may be sure there is absolutely nothing in the Word of God that would even suggest we cannot have revival today. The reason we are not having revival is that too few of God's people are willing to pay the price. They love their sin rather than God. Jonah paid a tremendous price. Of course, it was against his will, but had he been obedient to his first call, revival could have come without all the hardship and suffering he endured. I am wondering if God is not going to bring upon some of us similar chastisement. Perhaps we, too, will pass through a living grave before we emerge more than conquerors to go out into the highways and byways and proclaim the only message that can give life, hope, and victory to destitute and dying souls. Let us not deceive ourselves by waiting; let us pray, work, and give, that revival may come in this hour. God has told us to go. There is no alternative.

Following the conversion of Saul of Tarsus, God told Ananias to go and visit him, but Ananias was hesitant and afraid because he knew Saul's reputation. He recalled how Saul had made threatenings and slaughter against the disciples, and what he had done to the saints of Jerusalem was well known. But the command was given and no excuse would avail. God always turns a deaf ear to excuses when He tells His servants to go. With Him, go is go, and means nothing else. So we must go to a dying world today to tell of a living Christ.

Consider for a moment the reality of this revival at Nineveh. It was not a fly-by-night affair, nor was it a vast ingathering of church members. It was a transformation of life. The king, as well as all his subjects, came

together on common ground. All of them “put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them.” Such was an evidence of deep humiliation as the result of conviction for sin. To put on sackcloth, especially for those who were wealthy and in a position to wear fine linen, could be the result only of repentance before God.

Further, the king issued a decree that there should be a great fast throughout the land, that no one, including man or animals, should eat or drink; that all alike should be covered with sackcloth in humiliation before God. But even more than this, he declared, “Yea, let them turn every one from his evil way, and from the violence that is in their hands.” Is this not the real test of revival—change of heart? Indeed, it is. This is God’s description of a revival as given in 2 Chronicles 7:14, “If My people, which are called by My name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.” Holy Ghost revival results in a turning away from sin.

We hear much in our day about a religious upsurge—new church buildings, great crowds, more members than in all the history of the church, growing budgets. Some are quite optimistic over all this. As far as many of our church leaders are concerned, revival is on. While we think of the so-called religious upsurge, let us not overlook the fact that crime is increasing four times as fast as our population. For every dollar that we spend for our churches, we spend twelve dollars for crime. Penal institutions are filled to overflowing. Through our theaters, radio and television, our nation is fed a daily diet of debauchery. Millions of dollars are being spent to encourage our young people to drink, while hospitals are inadequate to cope with alcoholics. Revival—we need it today! God wants to send it. “With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible” (Matthew 19:26).

Maybe you are a Christian who needs revival in your own heart. That is where revival begins—in the believing heart. Why not let it start in your own heart? Have you grown cold toward God? Have you lost your zeal and fervor? Have you left your first love? Get right with the Lord. Claim the fullness of His blessing for your own soul.

It may be that you are one who has never had a personal encounter with Christ. You need the Lord. You need to experience His saving grace. Christ wants to forgive all your sins, but you must claim Him as your Redeemer and Lord. Will you at this moment invite Him to come into your heart?

15

THE DISPENSATION

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

IT IS QUITE LIKELY that the king of Nineveh had never used more discretion during his entire lifetime than when he decreed that every Ninevite should “cry mightily unto God” and turn “from his evil way.” In response to the king’s command, a great revival broke out as “the people of Nineveh believed God.” The threatened judgment proclaimed by the prophet was canceled, and the Lord granted a new dispensation. Instead of judgment, mercy was shown them—and God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, that He said that He would do unto them; and He did it not.”

What is meant by the statement that “God repented”? Does God repent? Under certain circumstances, yes; as to His divine decrees, no. Relative to every promise of His eternal Word, God declares in Malachi 3:6, “I am

the Lord, I change not.” But regarding a condemned, unbelieving sinner who sincerely trusts in the Lord, the attitude of the Almighty changes immediately. The guilty sinner becomes an accepted saint. In James 4:8 the apostle declares, “Draw nigh to God, and He will draw nigh to you.” In Ezekiel 18:20 we are told that “the soul that sinneth, it shall die.” But in 1 John 1:9 God says, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

God repented of the evil, that He said that He would do unto the Ninevites. When they turned from their sins to trust and believe in Him, God repented in that He changed the hour of doom to one of blessing. Actually the change was not in God but in the people themselves. Mercy or judgment is offered to everyone. Man must make the choice. To do nothing is to choose judgment. But the moment one calls on the Lord Jesus Christ and trusts in Him for salvation, immediately God changes in His attitude from judgment to forgiveness. He repents, so to speak, as His promises of eternal doom become those of eternal blessing. The believer is delivered from condemnation forever, while the unbeliever remains under the condemnation of God—”He that believeth on Him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God” (John 3:18).

If you have not believed on Christ, you are under His condemnation. To you God says in Romans 6:23, “The wages of sin is death.” Apart from Christ, you cannot possibly escape this judgment. When you die, you will enter into a worse death, spiritual death, which is eternal separation from God, ever to dwell in torment and misery. All of this can be changed now, if you turn from your sins to the living Christ. God makes this clear in Romans 10:9-10: “If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.” If you were to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, God would give you a new dispensation immediately. Condemnation would be canceled and eternal life would be the reward.

One might wonder whether or not the experience of the people of Nineveh was genuine. Jonah removes all doubt about this as we read that “God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way.” He not only heard their words as they cried aloud unto Him in humble repentance, but He saw their works as they forsook the old paths of sin and wickedness. Their works proved the reality of their words.

John the Baptist besought the people of his day to do the same thing. You will recall that he had been preaching a message of repentance, seeking to get everyone to turn from wickedness to holiness through the power of God. He was baptizing by the banks of Jordan. Many had gathered from all areas around to be baptized by him, on the grounds of their repentance before God. Among those that gathered, there were Pharisees and Sadducees who gave no evidence whatsoever of new life as a result of their professed repentance. To them John boldly declared, “O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance” (Matthew 3:7-8). In other words, the messenger of the Lord was saying, “Let me see some proof of your repentance.” Words were not enough for John; nor are they enough for God. Words, if they are genuine, will result in works.

This is the great truth James emphasized throughout his Epistle. Some have criticized the apostle’s strong emphasis on works rather than faith. He should not be criticized, for he is portraying the great essential of true faith. Faith, if it is real, will result in works; otherwise, it is not faith at all. Thus the apostle asks, “What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him?” (James 2:14) His answer is conclusive, “Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone” (James 2:17).

How many we know who profess to be followers of Christ and yet their lives give no evidence whatever that they have met Christ. They continue to run with the worldly crowd. They have little or no interest in Bible

reading or prayer. They never witness to lost souls about our living Lord. Have they actually repented of their sins and turned to God?

The Bible teaches that those who come to the Lord Jesus should “walk in newness of life” (Romans 6:4). No longer are they to follow the old paths of sin and worldliness. As new creatures, they are to walk along the Christ-honoring and God-exalting paths of righteousness. This is true repentance. Anything less will not suffice. We read in 1 Peter 3:18, “For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit.” This verse tells us that Christ died that those who believe might be brought to God. After a man is brought to the living God, will he be the same? There is no question about it—he will be different. He will be controlled by the Holy Spirit, with one earnest desire in his heart—to please the Lord.

One time we had a consecrated young pianist for a sacred concert in our church. All of us were held spellbound as this gifted servant of Christ rendered the sacred numbers. I shall never forget what he said at the conclusion of the concert. He told of his conversion, how the Lord Jesus had changed his life completely, giving him a purpose for which to live and a desire to walk in the way of the Lord. He went on to say, ‘Whatever talent I have is not mine, but His. He gave it and I want to use it for His glory.’ And then lifting his two hands high in the air, he paused. Looking at one hand and then the other, he said to the audience, “Above all else in life, I ever want these ten fingers to count for God. They are His. I want to use them for His glory.”

I could not help thinking of the fact that millions of people are using their God-given abilities to help themselves along in the paths of sin. They are squandering their gifts with no regard for the Lord who gave them. Even many so-called Christians are failing to use God’s gifts for His glory. How important it is that everything we have should be completely dedicated to Him, to be used in a way that will bring glory and honor to His name.

Have you truly repented of your sins and turned to Christ? Are you giving proof of this fact by means of a life that exalts the living Christ? How we need to pray daily, “Dear Lord, I want my lips, my eyes, my ears, my feet, and all I am to be a living witness to the Christ I love.”

Another thought comes to me as I think of the great revival at Nineveh and God’s change in His dealings toward the people. You will recall what has already been said regarding the seemingly hopeless condition of this idolatrous and wicked city before the revival. Who would not agree that such a revival as they experienced was supernatural? Surely it was. It could not be expected from a human standpoint; it was a definite miracle of God. Should not this provide the encouragement Christian workers need, to face the unbelief of our day? As we look about us, we recognize that conditions are no better than in Jonah’s day when he arrived at Nineveh. In many parts of the world unbelief has reached incredible proportions.

Miss Olga Kolchina, secretary of the Communist party’s Moscow Committee, said recently that Russian communists have not been successful in stamping out religion in the Soviet Union, and appealed for a “more decisive combat against religious superstition.” The intrepid woman dedicated her forty-minute talk at the Communist 22d Congress to the necessity for all communists to fulfill, point by point, the party’s blueprint for its fight against religion. She criticized the party organs for “weakening” their atheistic propaganda and for ignoring the fact that “some people among them—youngsters—are still under church influence.”

Would it not be unreasonable to expect that this woman and her followers, as well as those all over the world who adhere to the communist ideology, could be won to Jesus Christ? Certainly this seems unreasonable. But such a thing is not impossible, for the gospel that has been committed unto us to proclaim is described by Paul as the “power of God” (Romans 1: 16). Here is supernatural power, “mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds” (2 Corinthians 10:4). Why are we not seeing the effects of this power in our day? The answer is simple: Christians, those who say they are followers of the Lord Jesus Christ, are guilty of limiting the power. We

read in Psalm 78:41 of those who “limited the Holy One of Israel.” You and I are doing the same thing. God has committed unto us a gospel which is filled with the same power that brought the universe into existence. He has told us to take this gospel to every creature. We are limiting God’s power because we have not responded to our divine call and obligation.

The gospel produces little, as long as it is kept within our hearts. Its effectiveness is seen in its propagation. The Bible has only a minor value as long as it is kept on a shelf. But as soon as the Word of God is opened and proclaimed faithfully, the Holy Spirit uses it, and blessing is the result.

What would be the outcome in the world today if all believers really got serious about the propagation of the gospel? The same thing we have seen in Nineveh would be seen around the globe as millions of every tribe and nation would cry aloud to God in humble repentance. Millions of deluded souls all over the world are living under judgment today when they might be living under grace. You and I, who believe in Jesus Christ, have within our possession the key that could open the door through which the blessing of God’s grace could be poured forth upon these needy hearts.

Doubtless it seems ridiculous to some to think that the propagation of a simple message such as the gospel, which is ridiculed in most of our colleges and universities and spurned by old and young alike, could transform the world. Is it not irrational to expect that this gospel could draw lost and destitute souls to their knees before God? Impossible though the task may seem, it is not unreasonable. What is impossible with man is possible with God. If Christians would get concerned about the work of the Lord, the task of world-wide evangelization could be done. Of course, we know that when Christ returns, all unbelief will be subdued and Christ will be respected and honored as Lord of all. Paul tells us in Philippians 2: 10-11, “That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

What is the great need of the hour for Christians? That we launch an all-out attack to tell the lost about Christ. Before we can do this, however, there is another essential. Many are not in a position to witness to the unsaved about Christ. They are not ready to tell the lost and needy about Christ’s transforming power, for so few Christians have a firsthand experience of this power. Our first need is to get victory over sin in our own hearts, that we may be made ready to tell others about the Lord. Little petty sins, acts of deceit, thoughtless words, all need to be dealt with, that our hearts might be clean, thus permitting the Holy Spirit to work through us with liberty and power. Many who are talking about an all-powerful Christ are powerless in their own hearts because they need a fresh touch of the finger of God on their souls.

The battleship North Carolina lay in the harbor of New York. Her complement was about a thousand men. Among these were four Christians who discovered their spiritual kinship and mutual concern for the unsaved on the ship. With burdened hearts, they yielded themselves to Christ’s control and agreed to meet together for prayer. They obtained permission to use a small room in a little-used part of the ship far below the water line. They gathered one evening with great expectance. They were in dead earnest. They wanted God’s best. There were only four of them, but they were a united bond, representing three denominations: Episcopalian, Presbyterian, and Baptist.

They knelt in the dim light of a tiny lamp, agonizing before God, praying for the great host of sailors on board that needed Christ. Suddenly the Spirit of God filled their hearts with such a joy of salvation that they burst into song. The strange, sweet strain was heard by rough, hardy sailors, creating great astonishment. Ungodly shipmates came running to the room to see what was happening. Their first thought was to mock and ridicule the foolish Christians, but the power of God had already been released through intercessory prayer.

The sight gripped the men, and in a matter of moments their derisive laugh was changed into the cry of

penitent sinners. Rough fellows, giants in stature, and many of them giants in sin, were literally smitten down, and knelt humbly like little children beside the four. God was at work because four believing saints, who were willing to pay the price, felt that it was not unreasonable to expect God to captivate the hearts of unbelieving men. For many it would have been unreasonable, but not for these trusting believers.

A mighty work of grace began in the depths of that great ship. Night after night prayer meetings were held and conversions took place. With urgency, word was sent ashore for help and godly ministers came to assist. The battleship North Carolina became a veritable house of God. This ship was a receiving ship from which men were constantly drafted to other ships. The converts of the revival were thus scattered throughout the Navy. Be sure, a revival convert is a burning brand for God, knowing full well the power of the gospel. The holy fire spread rapidly from ship to ship. Wherever they were, they started a prayer meeting and became a soul-winning band. Thus ship after ship left the harbor of New York for foreign seas, each vessel carrying its band of rejoicing converts, and the fire of God was borne to the ends of the earth.

Nothing is more needed at this moment than earnest Christians who will mean business with God, who will declare with burning hearts, "We will serve the Lord" (Joshua 24:15). In the light of the pressing demand of the hour, with civilization crumbling and great nations of the world sinking, is it not time that we who know Christ offer ourselves to Him fully for the one purpose of the expansion of the gospel of the grace of God?

Two world wars have been fought in our generation. As I write these words, peace is prevailing in much of the world. Few of us want to think of the future. I believe that the reason we have peace at this moment is to give the Church of Jesus Christ one more opportunity to rise to her feet, to hasten to every corner of the earth, to tell the lost that the "gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 6:23). Let us go before it is too late.

Until you know Christ, you cannot go. If you do not know Him, your greatest need at this moment is to come to Him and repent of your sins. Let Him fill your heart with the joy of salvation. This is yours by believing on the Lord Jesus Christ.

16

THE DISCRIMINATION

"But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was very angry. 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" (Jonah 4:1-2).

HAVING EXERCISED discretion by turning unto God in response to Jonah's declaration of the message of impending doom, the people of Nineveh were given a new dispensation on life and judgment was forestalled. It would seem that the prophet should have poured out his heart in praise and thanksgiving to the Lord for the mighty revival in Nineveh. But just the opposite was the case. We read that "it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was very angry." It is obvious that this was a tragic case of discrimination.

Jonah is very difficult to understand. How could one who had ascended so high in spiritual experience stoop so low in his response to the revival at Nineveh? Lest we become pharisaical, perhaps we should become

personal by inquiring into our own behavior as to why we have failed so many times since conversion. An honest answer to this question will provide us with the satisfactory help we need to understand Jonah's failure.

Before we condemn the prophet, let us commend him. Perhaps you say, what is commendable in such an attitude? Not much, but one thing is certain; Jonah was an honest man. Who of us would dare to give such an honest appraisal of our selfish heart? As he writes, Jonah uncovers the bare facts about himself; there is no hiding or hedging. Is this not commendable?

Honesty is always commendable. In 1 Thessalonians 4: 11-12 God says, "Study to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you; That ye may walk honestly toward them that are without, and that ye may have lack of nothing." Further in Philippians 4:8 He says, "Brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just . . . think on these things." In 2 Corinthians 8:21 we read, "Providing for honest things, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men." Honesty and spirituality are always compatible. It is impossible for a dishonest man to be a spiritual man. His walk usually betrays his talk.

Thus the believer in Christ must be unusually careful to be honest in all things, lest he offend both God and man. We are living in an age when dishonesty and cheating seem to be the norm. We have seen others enjoy what appears to be success and accomplishment, while at the same time we are familiar with their underhanded methods. Be sure their apparent success is only temporary, for they have yet to face the all- righteous and holy God. They cannot escape His all-seeing eye, for the Bible declares, "Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in His sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do" (Hebrews 4:13).

Several years ago it was my privilege to speak at a gathering of students in a mid-western high school. I emphasized the importance of youth coming to Christ for salvation early in life, and then after conversion permitting God to live through them so that they might be helpful to others. At the same time, I stressed the tremendous need of honesty on the part of those who say they are Christians. At the conclusion of the hour I was approached by one of the teachers who expressed appreciation for what I had said, especially relative to the need for honesty. Then he told me about his experience in giving a history exam to junior and senior students a few days before. During the course of the examination, he heard a young man whisper the answer to one of the questions to another student. The teacher went to the offender and demanded that he put his paper in the wastepaper basket. Turning to the other student the teacher said, "You do the same, and both of you will take a zero." The boy who had whispered the answer became very disrespectful and bitter. Standing to his feet he shouted at his teacher saying, "Everybody cheats! What's wrong with it?" The teacher denied the statement that everybody cheats, but the young student continued to be abusive and argumentative. Thus he was sent to the school principal.

Considering further what the student had said about everybody's cheating, the teacher went to each student in the room and asked, "Did you cheat on this examination?" After inquiring of each of the thirty-two students in the room, he found that twenty-six of them admitted they had cheated. The teacher told me that rather than give the examination to his next class, which he had proposed to do, he gave a lecture on honesty. He further told me that he knew that most of those students who cheated go to Sunday school and church every Sunday.

"This perplexes me," he said.

Most of us can understand his perplexity. We realize that Sunday school and church will not necessarily make a person honest. Only a real heart experience with Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord can do that. But obviously, if one makes a profession of faith in Christ and goes to Sunday school and church, he certainly ought to be honest in all his relationships with others.

Jonah was honest. We must respect him for that. But on the other hand, he was prejudiced in his attitude toward the people at Nineveh. This evil led to bitterness, so much so that we are told that he was exceedingly displeased and very angry because of what the Lord did for these needy people. The word for angry which is used here means “very hot; to kindle, burn, fret, grieve; disturbed within.” This is a dangerous state; for an angry man is always a foolish man. God says in Ecclesiastes 7:9, “Be not hasty in thy spirit to be angry: for anger resteth in the bosom of fools.” Indeed, a man is a fool if he does not permit the Holy Spirit to control his anger. Who could begin to tell what misery and unhappiness anger has brought into the world? It has been a hindrance in business, in our churches, and most of all, in our homes.

The late Dr. Harry Ironside used to tell of a woman who came to a servant of Christ and said, “I wish you would go and talk to my husband. He is getting where he never stays home at night. He is such a bad example for our children; and, if I talk to him, he slams the door and out he goes.”

The minister happened to know something of that home and said to the woman, “Before I talk to your husband, there is something about which I want to talk to you. What about your vile temper? Go to God and say, ‘Oh, God, I come to Thee confessing my vile, wicked temper. My bad temper is driving my husband from our home. It is alienating my children. My bad temper is bringing dishonor on the name of the Lord. Deliver me from this temper, that thus I may be able to present the sweetness and graciousness of Christ, and so help my husband and children.’” Did she follow this golden advice? No, she jumped to her feet and immediately left the room in a fit of anger. We are quick to blame those around us for many of the circumstances we are in, but often the unconfessed sin of anger in the hearts of believers is bringing continual grief to them. God says to all of us who are in Christ, “Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption. Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you” (Ephesians 4:30-32). Are you grieving the Holy Spirit by the destructive sin of anger? Listen to God’s Word as found in James 1: 19-20, “Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath: For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God.” Do you see this? Anger opposes righteousness. Christ is our righteousness. Would you be filled with the power of Christ? Then you must let Him overcome your anger, that you might have a sweet, God-honoring spirit.

We have seen repeatedly from the book of Jonah that the prophet had his faults, as all of us do, but he knew where to take them. We read that “he prayed unto the Lord.” He was displeased with what God had done, but he did not run here and there to his friends voicing his displeasure. He did not disturb his neighbors with his complaints. He went where he should have gone—to his knees. If only we could learn this lesson.

*Oh, what needless pain we bear,
All because we do not carry everything to God in prayer.*

We think about our troubles, we talk about them, and so often we do everything but commit them to the Lord in prayer. In Luke 18:1 God says, “Men ought always to pray, and not to faint.” There is never a time when we are not to pray. In 1 Thessalonians 5:17 we are told to “Pray without ceasing.” The reason we have so little when we might have so much is revealed in James 4:2, “Ye have not, because ye ask not.” Can it not be said that much of the unhappiness you and I have borne through hours of toil and strife has been the direct result of prayerlessness? God says in Psalm 55:22, “Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and He shall sustain thee; He shall never suffer the righteous to be moved.” Because we have failed to do this, we have borne our own burdens and suffered the mental and physical anguish of such failure.

After one comes to know the Lord and yields his heart and life to the control of Christ, is there anything more important than Spirit-directed prayer? And yet, is it not true that we have emphasized witnessing, Bible study, missionary endeavor, and other worth-while pursuits in Christian growth, but have given very little time to the essential of prayer? Even though we may talk about it, few of us recognize prayer as the believer's means of accomplishing the great and mighty things God has promised in His Word.

Reading Finney's autobiography, we are shamed to realize that we have prayed so little. Finney was known as a man who prayed down revivals; not preached them down, not advertised them down, not programmed them down, but prayed them down.

What was D. L. Moody's secret of power? Intercession! Hourly, daily, yearly, lifelong intercession by God's humble servant moved multitudes toward the kingdom of God. There has never been a man or a woman who has done a mighty work for the Lord who did not spend much time in the presence of God, waiting on Him, calling upon Him, permitting Him to work through them in prayer.

Dr. Wilbur Chapman wrote to a friend: "I have learned some great lessons concerning prayer. At one of our preaching missions in England the audience was exceedingly small, but I received a note saying that an American missionary was going to pray God's blessing down upon our work. He was known as Praying Hyde.

"Almost instantly the tide changed, the hail became packed, and at my first invitation fifty men accepted Christ as their Saviour. As we were leaving I said, 'Mr. Hyde, I want you to pray for me.' He came to my room, turned the key in the door and dropped on his knees and waited five minutes without a single syllable coming from his lips. I could hear my own heart thumping, and his beating. I felt the hot tears running down my face. I knew that I was in the presence of God. Then with upturned face, down which the tears were streaming, Praying Hyde said, 'Oh, God.' Then for five minutes, at least, he was still again. And then when he knew he was talking with God, there came from the depths of his heart such petitions for men as I have never heard before. I rose from my knees to know what real prayer was. I believe that prayer is mighty, and I believe it as never before."

Prayer is mighty. Prayer is the power that moves the hand that moves the world. Let us use the power we have at our disposal. Thus we see Jonah going to his knees and calling on the Lord who had sent the great revival to Nineveh.

In his prayer Jonah reveals why he had fled to Tarshish. Because, as he says, "I knew that Thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest Thee of the evil." In other words, Jonah was saying to God, "I knew You would do this. I was sure You would manifest Your love to the Ninevites in such a way that they could not resist You, and then they would be equal with my own people, the Jews. They, too, would be believers in the Lord Jehovah." Jonah is to be commended for his compassion for those of his own country, but he is not to be commended for his lack of vision and concern for the Ninevites. His discrimination evidences the bigotry and prejudice of his deceitful heart.

One would think, after all Jonah had been through in his own experience with the love and mercy of God, that never again would he fail in his concern for those who needed a real experience with the Lord. But can it not be said that the sin of shortsightedness of which Jonah was guilty is one of the prevalent evils afflicting believers in our day?

Very frequently I hear Christians say, "Why should we be so concerned about evangelizing Africa, or South America, or other parts of the world, when there is so much to be done right here in our own country?" With enthusiastic sincerity they ask, "Why don't we evangelize our own homeland before we go out into other parts of the world?" Let me try to answer this with a few other questions. Why did David Livingstone leave Scotland to go to Africa to win the Africans to Christ while there were thousands upon thousands of people in Scotland who had not yet professed to know the Lord? Why did William Carey leave England to launch his

mission to evangelize India when all over the English continent there were unconverted people? Why did Judson leave America to go to Burma when right here in our own country there was no area where there were not thousands who needed Christ? Further, why did the Apostle Paul leave his native country of Palestine before everyone had been evangelized to go to Europe to preach the gospel? Why? Five words of Scripture give the answer— “The field is the world” (Matthew 13:38). We do not read that the United States is the field or that any other one country is the field. The Bible teaches that the entire world is the field. There should be no privileged people nor superior people. All alike are sinners in the sight of God, and for this reason His mercy reaches out to all. To you and me He says in Ezekiel 33:11, “Say unto them, As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked.” God longs for the unsaved to come to Him in repentance and faith, acknowledging His Son as Saviour and Lord. Those who do not see the world as the field (as God sees it) may be taking sides with unbelievers with hearts tainted with prejudice and shortsightedness.

Doubtless Jonah thought he had truly dedicated himself to the Lord’s control; but his attitude suggests the fact in Jeremiah 17:9 that “the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked,” literally—”incurably wicked.” How subtle is the human heart! It is for this reason that the believer must stay close to God. Daily we must fully submit ourselves to His guidance and control, praying that He will live through us, that the flesh will be subdued, and that the Holy Spirit will manifest His power within us.

At this moment, there may be little corners of your heart cluttered with sin about which you are unaware, as was the case of Jonah. Thus you need to pray, “Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me” (Psalm 51:10). In Psalm 24:3-5 we read: “Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? or who shall stand in His holy place? He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully. He shall receive the blessing from the Lord, and righteousness from the God of his salvation.” It is obvious from these verses that the blessing of God is found in holiness of life, permitting the eternal Christ to live through us. Is He living through you at this moment? It may be that you have never really met Him. Possibly you thought you had, but practical experience reveals that He is not there. Oh, turn to Him. Receive Him. Believe on His name and become a possessor of Christ rather than a mere professor of Christ.

17

THE DEJECTION

“Therefore now, O Lord, take, I beseech thee, my life from me; for it is better for me to die than to live. Then said the Lord, Doest thou well to be angry?” (Jonah 4:3-4).

How CLEVER the devil is! So often he strikes after seasons of unusual spiritual blessing and prosperity. This was Jonah’s experience. He was God’s instrument in one of the greatest revivals in history. Never before had he prophet witnessed such a profound working of the Holy Spirit. The hand of God had wrought a mighty miracle of grace. This provided an ideal setting for the tempter to work. Jonah was so enthralled by the overflow of spiritual power that he forgot to keep a watchful eye in anticipation of the enemy.

Subtle as he is, Satan knows well the best approach at the opportune moment. For centuries he had known of the feeling of the Jews toward the Gentiles. Thus, he capitalized upon this fact and enticed the prophet to yield to the sin of discrimination. Prejudice blinded Jonah’s spiritual perception and vision, causing him to complain

against God rather than praise Him. Such a negative attitude could result only in the state of dejection in which we now find the prophet. Hear him as he pleads with God, "Therefore, now, O Lord, take, I beseech Thee, my life from me; for it is better for me to die than to live."

Jonah wanted to escape from it all, not because he was primarily interested in going to Heaven, but because he wanted to get away from earth with its miseries. In Philippians 1:23 the Apostle Paul wrote, "For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better." Paul's desire was distinctly different from Jonah's. He longed to go to Heaven, but not as an escape from the responsibilities and burdens of life. Jonah was seeking merely a quick way out of his misery.

Most of us are like Jonah in that we are easily discouraged. While all is pleasant and going well, we are happy and contented. But, if things reverse, disrupting our selfish, man-made pattern, it is not long before we find ourselves wallowing about in the valley of dejection and despair. So often the reason for this is that we look to people and circumstances rather than keep our eyes fixed on Christ. People and circumstances are constantly changing, but the Lord never changes. He is the same "yesterday, and to day, and for ever" (Hebrews 13:8).

There is no doubt in my mind that one of the most successful methods the devil uses to hinder and curtail the work of the Lord is that of producing discouragement in the minds and hearts of God's people. He knows that, if he can get believers discouraged in the midst of their labors, soon they may give up the work altogether. This was the case with Jonah. As we see him now, he is discouraged and ready to quit. Discouragements and resignations usually go hand in hand. If the devil can get a Christian discouraged, very often the result will be a letter of resignation.

Several years ago it was my pleasure to hear Dr. Arnold T. Olson, who was one of the speakers at the Annual Founder's Week Conference at the Moody Bible Institute in Chicago. Doctor Olson told of his experience as a young man leaving home to prepare for the Lord's work. His father and mother drove him to the railroad station, and just before the arrival of the train, his dad took him off to one side and said, "Arnold, here are three dollars. If you ever feel that you must give up and come home, you will have the fare." The young man assured his father that he did not think he would have to use the money for this purpose, but he took the money and thanked him for his thoughtfulness.

As the years passed, Doctor Olson transferred the three dollar bills from wallet to wallet. Then one day word came that his father had died. He hastened home to be with his mother at this special time of need. As a part of the preparation for the funeral, he went to a florist, where he took the three neatly folded bills from his wallet and laid them on the counter, saying, "I want a bouquet of carnations." The last thing he did for his father was to put one of these carnations on the lapel of his coat as he lay in the casket. Pinning the carnation in place, Doctor Olson said, "Dad, I won't need the three dollars any more."

The speaker further told us that there had been many times when he was tempted to use the money to buy a railroad ticket to go back home. Often he had become extremely discouraged, even going so far as to compile letters of resignation. But in every instance it seemed as though the voice of the Lord spoke to him clearly saying, "Arnold—remember—you are called of God—you are called of God." Let me ask you, believer in Christ, have you ever been tempted to quit? Surely you have. You who are pastors, have you felt at times that you would like to resign your pastorate? What about you who are church board members? Have you wanted to get off the board? And that Sunday school class—have you tried to give it up? Possibly you thought you were not appreciated, or the work seemed to be so fruitless. Who of us has not been confronted time and time again by the devil who boldly tempted us to quit? How plausible his arguments sounded! Possibly you were foolish enough to listen to him. Some of us have made horrible mistakes, and today we are failures because we responded to Satan's skillful schemes rather than the Lord's will. If there is one method Satan uses more than any other to curtail progress and

to hinder the advance of the gospel among believers, I am convinced that it is to get them upset and confused through discouragement.

Somewhere I read a story of the devil's going out of business. An announcement was made stating that he was offering all his tools for sale to anyone who would pay his price. On the night of the sale all the tools were on display. What a sorrowful lot they were! Malice, hatred, envy, jealousy, sensuality, deceit, and all the other implements of evil were spread out, each marked with its price. In one corner of the room, separate from all the other implements of wickedness, was a harmless looking wedge-shaped tool, much worn, and priced higher than any of the others. Someone was supposed to have asked the devil what it was.

"Discouragement," he replied.

"Why do you have it priced so high?"

"Because," he replied, "it is more useful to me than any other tool I own. With it, I can pry open and get inside a man's consciousness, when I can not get near him with any of the others. And when once inside, I can use him in whatever way he suits me best. It is worn so much because I use it with nearly everybody, as very few people yet know it belongs to me." The devil's price for this tool of discouragement was so high that it was never sold. He still owns it and is still using it.

Our Lord warned Peter in Luke 22:31, "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat." To be sure, Satan is still at work seeking to sift every believer. Frequently he is successful. Almost always he uses discouragement in the process. For this reason it is important that we do not permit our eyes to be fixed upon people or things around us but rather upon the Christ we love. As we daily yield our lives to His control, we shall be able in His strength to overpower the enemy. If we are instruments in God's hands, empowered by Him, there will be no room for discouragement. We must keep in mind that the secret of joyful, happy and useful service is dependent upon full commitment to the Lord Jesus.

It is quite obvious that Jonah was out of fellowship with the Lord again. He broke fellowship because of his prejudice and anger. The result was discouragement and disinterest. Jonah soon forgot the words of his dedication, "I will sacrifice unto Thee . . . I will pay that that I have vowed."

And now he prays that he might die. God replied immediately, but the answer was quite different from the prophet's request, which suggests that Jonah was praying out of a selfish spirit rather than in the Holy Spirit. The Lord said, "Doest thou well to be angry?" This could also be rendered, "Do you have good reason to be grieved?" The prophet had nothing more to say at the time. God's Word is always clear and plain. Jonah knew well that his reasonings were groundless.

One cannot help feeling sorry for Jonah. As we see him now, he seems to be in a worse state than when he fled to Tarshish. Does it not seem ridiculous to see the prophet of God grieved and dejected because a heathen nation turned to the Lord? Yet, this sin is not uncommon in our day. Have we not known of instances where one evangelist becomes disturbed because another is being used in a greater way to lead souls to Christ? Do not pastors become jealous of one another as God seems to exercise a greater measure of usefulness through one man than He does through another? Are we not familiar with instances of Christian laymen on fire for God, pointing souls to the Saviour, while others stand back and criticize? Is this not the same error that brought on Jonah's lapse of faith and despondency?

Surely you realize, as well as I, that at the root of all this is the sin of jealousy. Jonah was jealous because the Ninevites, who had been hated and despised by the Jews for their extreme wickedness and idolatry, were now standing with the Jews in their worship of the one supreme God. It is difficult to conceive that a true follower of God could be jealous because the unsaved got right with the Lord. Yet such a thing is vividly prevalent, even in our day.

God says in Song of Solomon 8:6 that “jealousy is cruel as the grave.” Those who have been afflicted by this evil know well the meaning of this verse. The jealous heart is completely insensible to the love of God. The heart devoid of God’s love is without a burden and concern for the lost. The usual result is no vision and no purpose. Jealousy stamps out concern for others, leaving room only for love of self.

Was this not displayed in Jonah’s attitude? He was so jealous that he prayed to die as an escape from his sorry state. After receiving his first call to go to the Ninevites, he sought to flee from the presence of the Lord. Now he is seeking to flee into the presence of the Lord. Though the circumstances are different, his heart appears to be the same on both occasions. Now, as before, he is still motivated by the jealousy of his un-yielded heart. Probably you are bold enough to admit the prevalence of the delusive sin of jealousy in your heart. But the question is, how can it be overcome? Must one go on, day after day, plagued by this appalling evil? I am confident that there is a tried and proved path of escape. And what is that escape? Divine love! Jealousy can be overcome by the love of God.

Contrary as it may seem, jealousy is a form of love. It is a negative form, but nevertheless it is still love. Preeminently, it is love of self. How may we overcome love for self? By receiving God’s grace to love others. True love, God’s love, at work in our hearts enables us to forget ourselves so that we may manifest His love to others. Thus if we are to master this destructive sin of jealousy, we must permit God’s love to work through us toward those of whom we are jealous.

Two merchants were located on opposite corners. There was a strong rivalry between them, resulting in a feeling of bitterness. One of these businessmen was converted in special meetings. Thinking this would enable him to overcome his feelings toward his competitor, he was surprised to discover that, though he had been changed in many ways, he still harbored resentment toward his rival.

In desperation he went to his minister and said, “I am still jealous of that man and I do not know how to overcome it.” The pastor offered some worth-while advice as he said, “If someone comes into your store to buy something you do not have in stock, send him over to your neighbor.”

“Oh, I couldn’t do that,” replied the businessman.

“You try it and you will find that you will overcome your jealousy,” stated the pastor. After a somewhat lengthy discussion, the businessman said, “All right, I’ll try it.”

After that, whenever a customer came into his store for goods which he did not have, he would tell him to go across the street, that in all probability they would have it. What do you think happened? It was not very long before the competitor was sending customers over to the Christian’s store to buy items he did not have in stock. It was only a matter of weeks before the breach was healed.

God says in 1 Corinthians 13:4 that “charity [love] envieth not.” True love never does. As our hearts are yielded to the Lord’s control, He will rout out jealousy and enmity. Then and only then will we be in a position to fulfill our obligations of love to those around us. God says in His Word, “Owe no man anything, but to love one another” (Romans 13:8). Divine love cannot be generated within the human heart. It can be received only from Him who is love. The Bible declares that “God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him” (1 John 4:16).

Could it be that you are of an unloving spirit? Are you dejected and miserable of soul because of the underlying affliction of the sin of jealousy? Failure to treat this disease of the soul may result in tragedy. The late Dr. Clarence McCartney used to tell of sitting in the office of a doctor and talking to him about a victim of cancer who was near death.

“If two years ago that person had submitted to an operation, she would now be walking about and doing her work,” the doctor said. “But instead of that, soothing measures were taken and the virus spread through the

system.”

Jealousy is like cancer. It must be dealt with in its incipient stages. When fully developed, there is no surgery or medicine which can remove it. Is there in all the world a single person whom you fear might divide with you the kingdom of your affection and love? Then beware of jealousy! You are not too refined, too educated, too sensible, too Christian to avoid chastisement. The flame is there in your heart, and unexpected breezes of a tempting occasion may cause it to break forth in devastation that will appall you. Go to your knees, child of God! Let the Spirit of the Lord remove the malady from your soul as you sincerely pray—

More love to thee, O Christ, more love to thee.

Hear now the prayer I make on bended knee.

This is my earnest plea, more love, O Christ, to thee.

More love to thee, more love to thee.

Here is God’s answer—love Christ more and you will love self less. Possibly you have never sincerely loved Christ at all. Oh, you offer Him lip service, but your heart is rebellious and obstinate as you think of surrendering your entire self to His control. Have you ever truly received Him as your Saviour and Lord? Your greatest need at this moment is to come to Christ and claim Him as your Sin-bearer and Redeemer. If you never have, trust Him; believe Him. Receive the Lord Jesus into your heart.

18

THE DISSATISFACTION

“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” (Jonah 4:5).

IN A HORRIBLE STATE of dejection because of his reaction to God’s mercy in saving the Ninevites, Jonah becomes so disgusted that he prays to die. Not receiving the answer he desired, the prophet takes matters in his own hands and proceeds to gratify the lust of the flesh. Such action can only result in dissatisfaction.

Probably there is no statement in the entire book of Jonah as depressing as the first seven words of verse 5 in chapter 4: “So Jonah went out of the city.” If ever there was a time when Jonah was needed in Nineveh, it was during the days following the revival. Surely his task had not been completed so soon. Thousands had repented and turned to the Lord, but spiritually they were newborn babes, floundering, requiring guidance and teaching. They were as sheep without a shepherd. The prophet Jonah was the shepherd, but he deserted them at the time of their great need.

Jonah overlooked the importance of following through. Many of us have done the same. Can we not easily recall instances when some dear child of God slipped back into the paths of sin because of some failure of ours? We failed to give him the encouragement and fellowship he needed in the hour of testing, and he reverted to the old ways of life. Perhaps we were even critical of his failure, when in reality much of the blame should have been ours. Like Jonah, we went out when we should have stayed in to show our needy brother the way forward in his Christian experience. Doubtless there are many believers who were once honorable and true to God, but today they are defeated and miserable because some Christian failed to provide the proper spiritual assistance at a crucial

moment.

What a reminder this should be to all of us, that there is no time when we can live unto ourselves. If we belong to the Lord, walking in fellowship with Him, we are obligated to help our weaker brother in his battle with the tempter. The Apostle Paul emphasizes this strongly in Galatians, where he says, "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted. Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. . . . As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith" (Galatians 6: 1-2, 10).

None of us is immune to temptation. What has happened to our Christian brother could easily happen to us. For this reason we should be willing to help one another. Those who possess a strong sense of spirituality are duty-bound to share what God has given with those who are weak in the faith.

It is obvious from the tremendous number of believers who have stumbled, and then drifted from the Lord, that the ministry of helping the weaker brother has been neglected considerably. Think back over the years of your Christian experience and recall those who were once devoted saints of God but who are now cold and indifferent toward the claims of the Lord. Do you think that, if you had been more prayerful and exerted a greater personal interest in their spiritual welfare, possibly they might be enjoying the manifold blessings of God today? Doubtless there are few of us who are not guilty of this sin of neglecting to aid the rescue of struggling saints about to be shattered on the rocks of temptation.

In 2 Corinthians 1:3-4 we read: "Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God." Has the Lord not strengthened us repeatedly in providing comfort and help in the midst of the hours of adversity and trial? Had it not been for His grace and mercy, we might easily have turned in the wrong direction. We found the valuable truth of 2 Corinthians 12:9 to be so helpful—"My grace is sufficient for thee." His grace is always sufficient. Instead of being defeated, we were lifted up into glorious victory, attended by its consoling joy and peace. Thus God tells you and me that, as we have received this sustaining comfort from Him, we are to be ambassadors of comfort to His people. Hear the Word of the Lord as found in Isaiah 40: 1, "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God."

A new pastor, visiting one of his members, was told of a widowed cousin with four small children living not far from the church. This member said sadly of her cousin, "I regret to say that she cares very little for things of the Lord. I hope you will be able to get her out to church." The pastor listened politely, then replied, "I have already heard about her and have investigated. She is in great need. There is something she needs before coming to church."

"Is that so?" replied the surprised church member, "and what is that?"

"A friend," said the minister, "who will share her burdens. She is overworked and worried. She is unable to understand that her Heavenly Father does care for her. And is that strange? How can she know unless some of His children show her in ways that she can understand?"

Practical Christianity is urgently needed in our day. How many times, when conversing with someone going through some severe trial or temptation, we hastily reply, "Well, I'll be praying for you." It would be a serious mistake not to pray for one in such circumstances, but surely, there is more to be done. Help must be given. We who are in Christ, enjoying the power of God in daily living, are the ones to provide it.

Jonah went out of the city. So have we, time and time again, when we should have gone in. We went out to escape the burdens and miseries of others, when we should have gone in to assist them in alleviating their

troubles. Let us not make the mistake of waiting until our Christian brother reaches a spiritual catastrophe. Let us go to him and graciously provide the relief he needs, claiming the promise from God's Word as found in Matthew 25:40, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me."

Considering Jonah's spiritual state at the time of his exodus from the city, it would seem that it was probably better that he went out. With a heart filled with prejudice and anger, it is obvious that he needed help himself. It is a sad waste of effort for a backslider to try to tell others how to grow and abound in the things of the Lord.

The backslider is on dangerous ground, for God says, "No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:62). This verse does not say that the backslider is excluded from the kingdom of God, but rather it suggests that he is not a useful or productive part of it. In other words, he is out of fellowship with the Lord, and anyone out of fellowship with God is certainly a hindrance to the cause of Christ.

Can one know when he begins to backslide, or must he wait until he actually falls before discovering it? He may clearly know at the inception of temptation if he has any spiritual discernment whatsoever. Here are some of the usual guideposts that mark the paths that lead to a backslidden life: (1) If one grows bolder with temptation to sin than he did in his more watchful state, he is usually on the road down. (2) Making a small matter of those sins and infirmities which once seemed grievous is a sure means to defeat. (3) For one to become comfortable in Christian living, so that there is little service for Christ, oftentimes results in backsliding. (4) If we find ourselves enjoying conversations with men rather than taking time to talk with the Lord, trouble is near. (5) Spending more time with men's books than God's Book often results in evil at work in the life. (6) When God's exhortations become Christian duty or obligation rather than a joy and delight, the heart is growing cold. (7) Usually, if the world grows sweeter and more attractive than Christ, it will be found that interest in spiritual things begins to wane. There are other causes that lead to backsliding. These are just a few of the more familiar ones. Whatever the cause, they all lead to the same destination—a severed fellowship with God. The result?—misery, unhappiness, and dissatisfaction! "The way of transgressors is hard" (Proverbs 13: 15). Indeed, the way of the backslider is always hard.

"Mark Twain" was the pen name of Samuel Clemens. As a young man he fell in love with a beautiful Christian girl named Livy, and married her. Being devoted to her Lord, she wanted a family altar and prayer at meals after she and Sam were married. This was done for a time; and then one day Sam said, "Livy, you can go on with this by yourself if you want to, but leave me out. I don't believe in your God and you're only making a hypocrite out of me." Fame and affluence came. There were court appearances in Europe. Sam and Livy were riding high, and Livy got farther and farther away from her early devotion to her Lord. The eventual fall came. In an hour of bitter need, Sam Clemens said, "Livy, if your Christian faith can help you now, turn to it." Livy replied, "I can't, Sam, I haven't any. It was destroyed a long time ago."

What a regrettable state to be in! But many of God's dear children who were once walking with the Lord are far from Him today, knowing not His marvelous provision and His abundant love. Possibly you are wondering how anyone who has tasted of the goodness of God by drinking of the water of life could revert to the old wells of wickedness. Let us never forget the fact that even though we have been born from above and have received a new nature in Christ Jesus, the old fleshly nature is still with us. Unless we enjoy a moment-by-moment victory through Christ over the old nature, we shall all be backsliders.

It was the flesh that prompted Jonah to forsake his responsibility in Nineveh to go out to the hillside to watch and wait for the possible destruction of the city. There we see him constructing a makeshift covering of branches and leaves in an attempt to shield himself from the burning oriental sun. The "booth" Jonah built for

himself was totally inadequate. It protected him neither from the sun nor the weather to any degree. This suggests the feebleness of man's attempt in the energy of the flesh to provide shelter or security from the burdens and anxieties of life. Oh, if we could only learn the essential lesson of trusting God. David could say, "The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? the Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?" (Psalm 27:1) If we were to take verses like this one to heart and really believe them, we would not be fretful and overwrought, seeking help in every direction. Walking by faith in the perfect confidence which only God can give, we would believe Him for all things.

There are many Christians who are indwelt by the Holy Spirit but dominated by the flesh. They know little of waiting on the Lord. Usually they are running here and there, seeking to bring to maturity their own schemes and plans. It is possible to make the clock strike before the hour by moving the hands ahead, but the time will be wrong. One can tear the rosebud open before its time, but the beauty of the flower will be marred. So we may spoil a gift or blessing that God is preparing for us by our own eager haste. He is weaving our lives and has a perfect plan. Let us not pull at the threads.

Those who are motivated by the flesh are ever resisting God. He declares in Romans 8:8, "So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God." Further, in Galatians 5:17 He says that "the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would." Flesh service is always fruitless service. Jonah's expedition to the side of the hill provides an excellent example of this fact.

What was Jonah doing out in his little hut? Waiting "till he might see what would become of the city." It is probable that the "forty days" Jonah had spoken about in his message of doom had not yet expired. Thus he thought there was a faint possibility that in spite of the revival in Nineveh God might still change His mind and pour Out judgment on the city.

Can we not see another evil at work in Jonah's heart? In his backslidden state he has gone so far as to doubt God. Even though he had witnessed the divinely-sent revival after which "God repented of the evil that He had said that He would do unto them," the prophet doubted the Lord's Word. His was not a bold declaration of unbelief, but a subtle, cowardly denial of what God had declared.

Usually when one is in a backslidden condition, he is an easy prey for the sin of doubt. When God and His Word are doubted, what does one have to which to cling? Our Lord said to Peter, "O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?" (Matthew 14:31) Why did he doubt? He had only little faith in God and His Word. If we do not have unrestrained confidence and faith in God and in what He has said, then we shall doubt.

Small wonder that Jonah was dissatisfied with himself, the people of Nineveh, and life in general. Doubt can only produce dissatisfaction. It is very possible that you are a doubting believer. If so, you are an unhappy believer. Like Jonah, you may be out of fellowship with God, in a backslidden condition. Is there any way out of your mess? Decidedly so. Confess it to the Lord! Ask Him to help you! He will cleanse and forgive. Thank Him for it! Then daily follow the necessary steps for continued fellowship. Meditate on the Scriptures! Speak with the Lord frequently in prayer, and let Him live through you to help others,

If you have never received Jesus Christ into your heart and life, let Him come in now. If there are doubts that have kept you from God and salvation, invite Christ into your heart by faith, and He will remove all those doubts. With the removal of doubt, you will be able to trust Him fully for all things.

THE DEMONSTRATION

“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. But God prepared a worm when the morning rose the next day, and it smote the gourd that it withered. 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” (Jonah 4:6-8).

SELFISHLY Jonah Sits in his little makeshift hut, anxiously watching for the destruction of the Ninevites. Greatly disturbed by dejection and disappointment, the prophet seems to be mastered by the flesh rather than the Spirit. But the Lord is patient in His mercy and love. He refuses to be thwarted by the feeble failures of His people. Thus, Jonah is provided with a visible demonstration of the unfailing grace and goodness of God.

We read that “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.” The word prepared as used here does not mean that God created a particular plant for the immediate need, but rather that He appointed one of His already existent creations for the task. It is believed that He used the castor-oil plant, commonly known as the palmchrist, which grows from eight to ten feet high. Though only one leaf grows on a branch, that leaf is about a foot large. Thus, the collection of leaves on a palmchrist would provide a splendid covering. God’s provision was far superior to Jonah’s poor attempt to furnish protection for himself.

Doubtless there have been numerous times when, like Jonah, we have sought to accomplish things in our own strength rather than the Lord’s. The exhortation the Holy Spirit gave Job is most appropriate for all of us: “Stand still, and consider the wondrous works of God” (Job 37:14). Several times we have seen in the book of Jonah that one of the prophet’s failures was to run ahead of the Lord rather than wait on Him for guidance and direction. He sought to match his own human ingenuity with the providential care of God. What a tragic mistake! And yet, have we not repeated this error scores of times?

Oh, if only we could learn the secret of trusting God for all things, of believing His Word, and relying upon His divine guidance. He promises in Isaiah 43:2, “When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee.” Here is a glorious promise, but many of the Lord’s people have failed to claim it as they should. How important that we pause daily before God to remind ourselves that each day must be lived completely in Christ’s strength; if it is not, it will be a day of failure.

In a large metropolitan hospital there is a surgeon who insists upon having a few minutes alone before entering the operating room. Because of his great skill, many of the younger doctors wondered if there might be some relationship between his success and this unusual habit. When one of the interns put the question to the surgeon, he answered, “Yes, there is a relationship, a very close one. Before each operation I ask the Great Surgeon to be with me, to guide my hands in my work. There have been times when I didn’t know what to do next, and then came wisdom to go on, wisdom which I know comes from God. I would not think of performing an operation without asking God’s help.”

As this surgeon realized the importance of relying upon the unlimited power of God, so you and I must master this significant fact. Up to this point in our study of Jonah, it appears that Jonah has not yet learned this lesson. He is still overcome by a self-reliant life, lived in the wisdom of the flesh.

Jonah’s response to God’s miraculous provision of the gourd was most favorable. We read that “Jonah

was exceeding glad.” The palmchrist is known to grow rapidly, but to see its growth supernaturally accelerated before his eyes and to realize that it grew in the proper direction, providing a complete covering from the intense rays of the sun, brought gladness to his heart. There was nothing unusual about Jonah’s response. Probably anyone, believer and unbeliever alike, would have reacted in the same manner. But it would seem, after all he had been through and after seeing this further mighty intervention of God, that Jonah would have fallen to his knees with praise and thanksgiving to the Lord. Doubtless he was happy about the miracle only because he was selfish. The covering alleviated his grief, and he was glad.

On one occasion David wrote, “I will praise the name of God with a song, and will magnify Him with thanksgiving” (Psalm 69:30). Jonah completely forgot to do this. Usually, if one is blessed of the Lord and he forgets to praise the Lord, the blessing is missed completely. It is for this reason that God tells us in Ephesians 5:20 to give “thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Further in Psalm 50:23 He says, “Whoso offereth praise glorifieth Me.”

We do not live by chance. Every provision in our lives comes from the gracious hand of God. How regrettable that we fail so often to praise Him for His loving care and generous supplying of all our needs. All too frequently Christians leave thanksgiving to one day of the year. For the true believer, thanksgiving should be not only an annual affair, observed because of custom and a presidential proclamation, but also a daily duty and privilege for all those who are devoted followers of Christ. “In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you” (1 Thessalonians 5: 18). We should give thanks for sorrow as well as joy, disappointment as well as blessing, grief as well as happiness.

The saintly Frances Ridley Havergal used to keep what she called her “Journal of Mercy.” Because she was ever on the lookout for tokens of God’s grace and bounty, she found His mercies everywhere. Upon finding them, she noted them in this journal. Dr. J. H. Cues once said that “Many a complaining life would be changed into music and song by a ‘Journal of Mercy.’” How true! Indeed, we need to count our blessings daily, that we might praise the Lord continually.

Obviously the reason Jonah did not praise the Lord was that his heart was not right with the Lord. Ungratefulness is a positive proof of an un-yielded heart. Recall how David, after a period of deep soul searching, declared with enthusiastic praise, “Bless the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless His holy name” (Psalm 103:1). Such an attitude requires a mind at peace with God. If we are to bless the Lord in this manner, from the depths of our being, our wills must be in perfect oneness with His. There can be no resistance, rebellion, or refusal relative to His plans. There must be not only willingness to obey but sincere belief in the heart that God’s will is best. Should this be difficult when we realize that it was the Lord who made us, who spared not His only Son for us, who knows exactly what our capacities and limitations are and for what work we are best fitted? Without question He understands our circumstances and knows what is needed for our best possible training. Stopping to realize this and sincerely believing it should evoke praise to God for all things.

Are you able to praise God with your whole heart? If not, then you are like a piano with one or two sour notes, a violin with a loose string, or a cornet that is flat. Such instruments are an annoyance. They make anyone wince who has an ear for music. Even the best Christian pianist in the world would have difficulty playing “To God Be the Glory” on a piano which had several notes out of tune.

What about your heart? Are there strings that are slack —or perhaps so tense that the harmony is broken? Are there keys on the keyboard of your heart that give a harsh sound or are silent, which should have been repaired long ago? If false musical notes offend our human ears, how much more offensive to God must be words prompted by bitterness, stubbornness, or murmuring in the heart.

At the threshold of Psalm 103, the Psalmist puts the desire to give unrestrained praise to the Lord. There is

no use going on with the rest of the psalm until we can do that. We know pretty well whether the strings of our hearts are in tune with God's standard notes. If there is any doubt, the Spirit can show us and enable us to get them in tune. Only as we are in tune with God's plan and will, can we give forth the music of praise from the depths of our hearts. Let us be sure that all is well with our souls, and then thanksgiving will be no problem. Then we shall say as did David in Psalm 30:12, "O Lord my God, I will give thanks unto Thee for ever."

The Lord not only appointed a gourd to cover Jonah, but He also "prepared a worm when the morning rose the next day, and it smote the gourd that it withered." In light of the circumstances, it would seem that Jonah's protection from the torrid oriental sun was destroyed because of his thankless and ungrateful attitude toward God. Doubtless this has been the case in many of our so-called losses in life; but it seems clear that the purpose of the gourd's destruction was for more than punishment. The Lord was demonstrating a great truth to Jonah. God knew the prophet perfectly; but in order to get Jonah to know himself, it was necessary for God to speak in understandable terms. Thus, the gourd and the worm were part of an object lesson, used by the Lord, to convey to the prophet the truth of God's great love.

One thing the prophet overlooked was that though the gourd was gone, God was not gone. In his hour of need Jonah fixed his eyes on the protective gourd. Its temporary covering brought sustaining comfort for his troubled heart. How much better it would have been had he fixed his eyes on the Lord. The gourd was only transitory, but God is eternal. If we look to self or things, soon we shall fail. But if we trust in the Lord, we shall never fail. How well Paul expressed this in 2 Corinthians 3:5, "Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God." Is your sufficiency of God? Often we accept this in theory but do not apply it in practice. Can you say with Job, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him" (Job 13: 15)? If all else were taken from you, could you fully trust the Lord?

A pastor tells how his little granddaughter, not yet three, taught him a great lesson. When trying to do something beyond her reach and strength she called on him saying, in a very pathetic voice, "Help me." Instantly there came to his mind the familiar words of Matthew 7:11, "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask Him?"

Why should we not trust the Lord for all things? He has given us a Book, the Bible, which is full of promises that are to be received and believed. If we were to act upon these promises, we should reap the benefits of which they speak, and know the peace that only God can provide. Certainly Christians must expect hardship and toil. But these are only means to an end. David declares in Psalm 34:19, "Many are the afflictions of the righteous: but the Lord delivereth him out of them all." We are told here not of partial deliverance but complete deliverance. What a pity for Jonah to trust in a gourd rather than in God!

But what about us? Do we rely upon that which we see rather than depend completely upon Him who is unseen? Could it not be said that one of the greatest needs among Christians today is for men and women who will really believe God? There are many who profess to be believers in the Lord. There are numerous really saved people who believe on the Lord Jesus Christ as their Saviour and in God as their Father. But is it not true that most of us are unbelieving believers? We have trusted God for eternity but we doubt Him for the present moment. We believe for our souls but we fret in our bodies. We have committed to our Heavenly Father the greater, but we are reluctant to do this for the lesser needs and burdens of life.

Isaiah was a man who proved often that he really believed God. You may recall the incident from the sixth chapter of his prophecy, where he went into the temple with a great burden on his heart. He was distraught, disturbed, and overwrought. What did he see in the temple? He tells us in verse 1 that he "saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and His train filled the temple." Did he see the burden? No, he saw the Lord. Further he says, "The whole earth is full of His glory" (Isaiah 6:3). Had he been a man of shallow faith and feeble

confidence in God, he might have said, “The whole earth is full of my burden.” But not Isaiah, who further said, “Trust ye in the Lord for ever: for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength” (Isaiah 26:4). Though surrounded by adversity and confusion, he saw the Lord. What about us? What about you at this moment? What do you see? Jonah could see only the gourd, and when the gourd was destroyed he could see nothing but grief and anxiety ahead.

Further, in His demonstration to Jonah, “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.” Jonah rallied briefly, but not for long. He was glad for a few hours, but soon his satisfaction vanished. Not only did God remove Jonah’s covering, but He sent a hot, sultry east wind so that the prophet was made more uncomfortable than ever. The hot, burning wind of the east is described in the Septuagint by a picturesque word meaning “scorcher.” Thus, in a miraculous way God used another natural phenomenon to fulfill His purpose in Jonah. There sits Jonah, miserably uncomfortable, suffering bitterly from the intense heat, longing to die. Doubtless he is so engrossed in his own discomfort, at least for the present, that he has forgotten about his selfish desire to see Nineveh destroyed.

Poor Jonah! He fainted when he should have trusted. He must have been like the seed our Lord spoke about that “fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth: and forthwith they sprung up, because they had no deepness of earth: and when the sun~ was up, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away” (Matthew 13:5-6). Jonah was withering away. He wanted to die. He fainted within himself.

Have you ever been in this sad predicament? Maybe you are there now. Your gourd is gone. That in which you have centered everything in life has disappeared. You are weak and faint within, wishing you could die. Learn a needed lesson from Jonah. All has not ended. God is alive and He wants to help you. Why not take Him at His Word? Say with David, “Thou art my God. My times are in Thy hand” (Psalm 31:14-15). Here is assurance in the Lord that will enable us to face any calamity.

Dan Crawford used to translate these words from Psalm 31 saying, “All my life’s why’s, when’s, where’s, and wherefore’s are in God’s hands.” Can you say that today? If so, you are supremely happy. You have found the Lord to be what He wants to be in your life. It is not God’s purpose that His people be miserable and unhappy. He wants us to rejoice evermore and to experience the abounding joy He has provided.

One time a disappointed, unhappy saint went to her pastor for help. After listening to her story he asked, “Have you ever read Psalm 37?” Her face lighted up.

“Yes, that is my favorite psalm. I know it by heart.”

“What is the first word?” he asked. He expected that she would say, “Fret not,” but she answered accurately, “Fret.”

The pastor informed her that the first word of the psalm was the only part she really knew by heart. She was fretting most of the time. He urged her to repeat the first sentence of the Psalm—“Fret not thyself because of evildoers.” Then he asked, “Who is causing you to fret?” The Holy Spirit had directed in this question, for this was the real cause of the difficulty. She told him that it was a certain young man, and then proceeded to tell all about the troubles in her home. The pastor drew her attention again to Psalm 37. After repeating the opening words several times—“Fret not thyself”—the meaning finally dawned on her.

“Oh,” she cried, “you mean that I am the one that is doing it. And all the time I thought it was someone else.”

Others may be the occasion of our worry, but none can cause us to fret except ourselves. This young woman came into the wonderful realization that, as we fully trust the Lord, we can experience God’s marvelous peace. We need not faint within ourselves. Even though we may be in the intense heat of severe affliction, if our

hope is in the Lord Jesus Christ we shall have peace.

Is your hope wholly in God? Have you met Christ? Have you taken Him into your life? Possibly you have tried to build a covering for your soul by means of your good works, your church membership, or by some other delusive means. Your covering will be as useless as Jonah's makeshift hut. The blood of Christ has been shed for your sins, to provide a covering acceptable to God. If you have never turned to Christ before, turn to Him now, thanking Him for what He has done. Receive Him as your Saviour and Lord, then trust Him for all things.

20

THE DEVOTION

“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. Then said the Lord, Thou has 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, 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?” (Jonah 4:9-11).

WORDS did not seem to move Jonah, so the Lord provided a practical demonstration of His divine mercy and goodness. The gourd, the worm, and the vehement east wind were the objects God used to convey a needed lesson to the prophet. Slowly Jonah was brought to a state of utter helplessness. Disgusted with everything, he wished he could die. At last, he is in a position to hear. His heart has been made pliable. Thus, the Lord speaks; and what is His closing message to the prophet? There is none greater—the love of God; His boundless devotion for needy souls. Of course, we have sensed the manifestation of His love throughout the entire narrative, but it seems to reach its grand climax here in the closing verses of the book. In reply to Jonah's request to die, God asks, “Doest thou well to be angry for the gourd?” Hastily Jonah answers, “I do well to be angry, even unto death.” Angry used here is a word meaning “grieved.” The prophet is overcome by grief because of the withered gourd. Depressed and disturbed, he evidences bitterness as he tries to assure God that he has a right to be grieved over such a loss.

Were it not for God's unfathomable love, He might have forsaken Jonah at this moment and permitted him to die. But oh, the mercy of our gracious God, that He continued to reason with the rebellious prophet. The Lord points out the inconsistency of Jonah's attitude by saying, “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, 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?”

This portion of Scripture emphasizes not only the mercy of God, but also the sovereignty of God.

“Should not I spare Nineveh?” God asks. Was this not His prerogative? Is it not within the confines of the Creator to give or take as His divine will directs?

So often we question Providence because the purpose of God's actions are unknown to us. But ignorance of the divine plan is certainly no reason for doubting God's loving care. Paul wrote in Romans 9:20, “O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to Him that formed it, Why hast Thou made me thus?” In Isaiah 55:8-9 we read, “For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, saith

the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts.” How foolish of man to question the inerrant providence of God. This is one reason why Jonah was miserably unhappy. Not resting in the Lord, he resisted Providence, selfishly clinging to his own thoughts and plans.

Have not some of us known of occasions when tender hearts became bitter because God in His gracious providence saw fit to call a precious loved one unto Himself? How well I recall sitting beside a young wife whose husband died suddenly, only a few hours before. With deep remorse and consternation she cried out continually, “Why did God do this to me? Why did God do this to me?” She acted as though God were betraying her, as though He were her enemy. She overlooked completely the fact that “the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear Him” (Psalm 103:17). She failed to realize that God never makes mistakes, that what He does is always for good.

Jonah neglected to consider the sovereignty of God, but also he ignored the wideness of God’s mercy. In communing with the prophet, God stressed that, if Jonah had pity on a short-lived gourd which possessed neither a soul nor immortality, was it not to be expected that the Almighty, who is not willing that any human should perish, would be concerned about the thousands of inhabitants in Nineveh and would spare them?

Jonah did nothing to produce the gourd. In no sense did the shrub belong to him. He did not plant it or tend it. It came and went without the slightest expenditure of labor on his part. On the other hand, God created the people of Nineveh. The Ninevites were not plants sprouting up in the morning and perishing at night; they were immortal souls, precious to the Lord.

Nothing in the entire universe is as valuable as the soul of a man. Jesus made this fact clear in Mark 8:36-37, “For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?” In Psalm 49:8 David declared that “The redemption of their soul is precious.”

The Lord further reminds Jonah that not only were there adults in Nineveh that needed divine help, but there were “sixscore thousand persons” unable to “discern between their right hand and their left hand.” Here were a hundred twenty thousand innocent children who had not yet come to the age of discernment whereby they could distinguish good from evil. It has been estimated that in the light of this figure there must have been at least six hundred thousand inhabitants in Nineveh.

Further, God makes it clear that the city should be spared because of the vast number of harmless cattle that were there. Oh, the grace and concern of God! Not only is He concerned about souls, but all of creation. In Psalm 50:10 He says, “For every beast of the forest is Mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills.” The Lord is the rightful owner of all the cattle, and in His unrestrained and unlimited mercy He cares for them.

Let us pause for a minute to consider the contrast. Jonah is complaining about the death of a gourd that came up in a night and perished shortly after, but he had no pity whatsoever for the six hundred thousand people in Nineveh. Actually, is this not a true picture of many who call themselves Christians in our day? They whine about their few minor discomforts in life, while they seem totally indifferent to the extreme suffering of countless millions in the world who need Christ. This was one of the evils that disturbed our Lord, as He spoke with some of the ecclesiastical leaders in Jerusalem, saying, “Ye blind guides, which strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel” (Matthew 23:24). Most of us are guilty of the same evil, We fix our eyes on things and become irritated over trivialities, when we should fix our eyes on the lost and be burdened for their souls. Indeed, the Lord Jesus provides us with the supreme example for this aspect of Christian living. How easy it would have been for Him to complain of His treatment at the hands of wicked men during His few brief years of ministry. As he trudged from city to city with His little band of disciples, He had no place to lay His head. He was unwanted and despised by many wherever He went. Ultimately He was arrested, tried with a mock trial, condemned, beaten, ridiculed, nailed

to a cross, and slain. How did He react to all of this? His few words on the cross provide the answer: "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). How do you account for this? Look at Matthew 20:28: "The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many." He was not born into this world to live for Himself, to be concerned about His own needs. He had His eyes on the sins and sufferings of mankind. The burdens and the heartaches of the entire world were His. And so, He went on to die in answer to the burden of His heart.

As we permit the Lord Jesus Christ to get hold of us, we shall visualize everything in a similar perspective. The minor and insignificant things of no lasting value will soon become unimportant. No longer shall we be occupied with interests that do not honor the Lord. Rather, we shall be concerned about the supreme task to which we have been called. In His high-priestly prayer, Jesus prayed, "As Thou hast sent Me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world" (John 17:18). Our Lord came "to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10). We who know Him are left here for the same reason. Too few of the people of God are living for this purpose. But on the other hand, God has always had His faithful servants who have realized their true mission in life.

Some years ago a young man standing in the doorway of his home watched the traffic. Noticing a flashy, brand-new automobile, he exclaimed, "Boy, wouldn't I like to have a car like that!"

"Why don't you get one, William?" asked a friend standing near him. The reply was unexpected, "I can't afford it." The answer was unexpected because the speaker was William Borden, a descendant of the famed Borden family of Chicago, founders of the prosperous dairy business. In his own right, William was worth a million dollars.

William's mother was a zealous Christian, active in the Moody Memorial Church of Chicago, of which Dr. R. A. Torrey was then the pastor. It was through his mother's influence when he was but a boy that William Borden was constrained to see his pastor about his own spiritual need. Dr. Torrey pointed him to Christ and led him into the assurance of salvation.

From then on William Borden did not consider himself his own master. Nothing he owned was his, including his inherited wealth. That is why he could not "afford" a car, or many other things a wealthy young man would have purchased without hesitation. His money was a trust from God, to be used only at the discretion of the Holy Spirit.

After he was graduated from prep school in 1904, Borden's parents decided that a trip around the world would broaden him in preparation for the university years ahead. Little did they realize what that globe-encircling trip would do for him spiritually, for it was on this trip that he wrote to his mother, "I have so much of everything in this life, and there are so many millions who have nothing and live in darkness." By the time he arrived home a decision was crystallizing in his mind.

"When I look ahead," he said, "the only thing to do is to prepare for the foreign field."

He had given his heart to Christ when a lad; now as a young man he surrendered his life for service on the mission field. There followed further preparation at Yale and Princeton, and then the commissioning as a missionary at the Moody Memorial Church.

The fact that the wealthy William Borden was sacrificing a life of ease and comfort for the foreign mission field, attracted wide publicity in the newspapers. But for this notoriety Borden cared nothing. His heart was set on China, So in December of 1912, he sailed eastward on his way to Kansu.

He arrived in Cairo shortly after. There, under the tutelage of Dr. Samuel Zwemer, he began to study missionary methods which he thought he would need later. But in the providence of God, he never needed them. In April of 1913, after a brief bout with cerebral meningitis, he passed into the presence of the Lord.

Borden's short life had a powerful effect upon his generation. His death was no less effective. His will was a legacy which reflected an intense loyalty to Christ and a deep concern for the perishing heathen. He left the bulk of his ample estate to home and foreign missions.

Doubtless there are some who would consider this a wasted life—just a few brief years. It was not a wasted life; it was an invested life—a life that had caught a transforming glimpse of the purpose for which Christ died. It was a life that gave, even to the giving of himself, that souls who are lost and dying without a Saviour might have a chance to hear the gospel.

It is obvious from what we have seen in the book of Jonah thus far that the prophet failed to enter into this kind of life. There are millions like Jonah in our churches today. They are selfish and insincere. They sing lustily and heartily:

We've a story to tell to the nations, that shall turn their hearts to the right;
A story of truth and mercy, a story of peace and light.

They sing about it, but they do not tell this story. They are failing to bear the glorious truth of the gospel to the needy millions.

The book of Jonah begins with the Word of the Lord coming to the prophet. It closes with the Word of the Lord piercing the heart of the prophet. Jonah is completely silenced by the fact of God's devotion. He offers no rebuttal, for there is nothing more to be said. He has resisted God for a long time, but this seems to be the end of the battle.

It is my opinion that at this point Jonah experienced a real and lasting spiritual victory. We hear his voice no more, but I feel that he must have repented once and for all. Moved by God's concluding argument, Jonah must have seen himself as the "chief of sinners." Considering the criticism, bitterness, and jealousy of his heart, surely he fled to the God of all grace who alone could wash away his sin.

How do I arrive at this conclusion? The fact that Jonah wrote the book that bears his name tells me this. We read in 2 Peter 1:21 that "the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." Silenced by the realization of the Lord's great love, Jonah had no more arguments. Thus, he went to work recording his entire experience, telling the whole story of his repeated failures, but at the same time intertwining each failure with the grace and mercy of God, concluding the book with the greatest theme of all—God's love for sinful men. Had not Jonah experienced the fullness of God's devotion and power, I doubt that he would have had the courage to make a permanent record of his tragic failure to be the man God wanted him to be. It seems that he must have become one of the "holy men of God" who spoke and wrote as the Spirit gave him utterance.

As we conclude our study of the book of Jonah, is it not an opportune time to examine our own hearts before God? We must remind ourselves constantly that the Scriptures are for more than our enjoyment. They are for our "learning," that we might consider them in the light of our spiritual needs. "Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning" (Romans 15:4). God has given us His Word that we might profit by the mistakes of men like Jonah, and not duplicate these errors in our own lives.

Need it be said that many of Jonah's failures have been our failures? As we have studied this book together, who of us has not seen himself in Jonah many, many times? Let us turn to Him who overshadows the entire book, to Him who surrounded Jonah even when he failed the most. With His unending love and abundant grace, He calls to us. He pleads with us to yield ourselves to His entire control, that He might be permitted to live through us, fulfilling His holy plan for our lives.

It is obvious that many Christians have not surrendered unconditionally to the mastery of Jesus Christ. They have surrendered their sins to Christ, but not their wills. Was it not the fact of an un-surrendered will that brought so much misery and grief into Jonah's life? The same may be the reason for your distress and anguish. If you know of anything that you have been withholding from the control of our wonderful Lord, why not give it to Him now? Tell Him that you will now turn it over to Him for time and eternity. Tell the Lord who saved you that He may have all that you are for His complete mastery, to use for His glory. Every habit of your life, every ambition, every hope, every loved one, every possession, your entire self—all these He must have if He is to make Himself not only your Saviour but the Lord of your life.

It is very possible that you still may not be a child of God. You have never definitely invited Christ into your life. Oh hear His voice before it is too late. Respond to His call at this moment. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved" (Acts 16:31).