Jonah - Commentaries by Unknown Author

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"So Jonah was exceeding glad of the gourd" (Jonah 4:6). Not only was he "glad," but he was "exceeding glad" because of the gourd, as he had been exceedingly displeased because of God's mercy. How we delight in those temporal mercies that add to our ease and comfort! The luxuries of the present day are often to us what Jonah's gourd was to him—the cause of exceeding gladness.

"But God prepared a worm when the morning rose the next day, and it smote the gourd that it withered." v. 7. Whether a whale or a worm the same word is used. God "prepared" them both. As we see those things which have added to our ease and pleasure, fade and die, we may do well to consider whether it is our own loving God who Himself has prepared the worm to make them pass away. We may learn lessons in adversity, in scorching suns, in poverty and want, that we never could have learned in prosperity and ease and luxury.

Salvation, Salvation: Part 1

What depth, power, and fullness in the brief passage which we have just culled from the book of Jonah! What a truth it presents to the heart! " Salvation is of the Lord." It is not of man, nor by man. It is divine. There is not one atom of the creature in it, from first to last. If there were the weight of a feather, or the movement of an eyelash of man's doing, in any shape or form, it could not be said—because it would not be true—that " salvation is of the Lord." But, blessed be God, man has nothing to do with it, but to receive it, enjoy it, and walk in the light of it, now and forever—here and in heaven.

But ere proceeding to unfold the precious word " salvation," we must remind the reader of something very necessary for him to know and remember; and that is that the very fact of God's having provided salvation for man is a plain and unanswerable proof that man is lost. There is no getting over this. It may be said to be an indirect proof; but it is a proof, and one that cannot be gainsayed. Why provide salvation, if man be not lost? For, be it noted, it is not a question of help. Mere help will not do! A man may say, " With the help of God I hope to get to heaven when I die." But this implies that he is to co-operate with God in the great business of salvation; and in that case, most clearly, salvation would not be of the Lord; but partly of the Lord, and partly of man. And, moreover, man could never sing that lovely song of the redeemed, " Worthy is the Lamb," inasmuch as he would have to add, " Worthy am I," which were simply blasphemy, and nothing less.

But no; man is lost—totally, absolutely, and irretrievably lost, in himself—lost and perfectly powerless—perfectly incompetent to help himself, in any one way. It must, therefore, be a full, free, and perfect salvation, or nothing at all It must be wholly of God, or it is of no possible use. Every link in the golden chain of salvation must be of divine formation; for if man had to supply a single link, it would, most assuredly, be a missing one.

Has the reader been brought to see this? Have his eyes been opened to see his true condition, as utterly lost—not merely defective in some points, but absolutely lost Say, reader, has the Holy Ghost led you to see the real truth of the matter; as to your state in the sight of a holy God? Have you been really brought to take your true place as lost? If so, you are in a position to enter into the meaning of the glorious word that forms the heading of this paper.

But it must be a reality—the genuine fruit of the Spirit's work in your heart and conscience. It will not do to take up the heartless, powerless, worthless, formulary of general profession, and say, " We are all sinners." It is an entirely personal matter. It is not " We" but " I" We cannot escape in a crowd. When the Holy Spirit deals with the soul—when He sends the arrow of conviction into the heart—when He brings the conscience into the light; then, verily, we are made to feel the intense reality of that wonderful little monosyllable—" lost." Then, too, we find that nothing short of a full, free, everlasting salvation will avail for us. Help will not do; we want to be "saved." The only word that -will' do to put over against our true condition as lost, is that most precious little word—saved. The former expresses all that we are in ourselves—all that we are in nature. The latter sets forth all that we are in Christ.

And we are either the one or the other. There is no neutral ground, as to this question. The reader is either lost in himself, or saved in Christ. No doubt, there are heights and depths in our lost condition—heights of folly and depths of depravity—some higher up and some deeper down—various shades, grades, and conditions of lost men, women, and children. So also there are heights and depths in our condition as saved—heights of privilege and depths of spiritual blessedness. But there is not the breadth of a hair between those two conditions—lost or saved. Reader, where art thou?

(To be continued if the Lord will.)

Salvation, Salvation: Part 2

"Salvation is of the Lord." Precious words! Most precious to all those to whom the Holy Ghost has interpreted the meaning and force of that one little word " lost." Only such can really understand them. When Jonah uttered these words, he was, in good truth, as low as any human being could well be. We know, from our Lord's own words, that he was a type of a greater than Jonah; but only in the fact of his being three days and three nights in the belly of the fish. There is the immense difference between the type and the Antitype, that the latter went down

into the depths, as an obedient One, on behalf of others; the former went down as the fruit of his own willfulness. Jesus suffered, the just for the unjust; Jonah suffered the consequences of his own self-will his was self-earned sorrow.

This makes all the difference. But, notwithstanding all this, we hear the voice of Jonah sounding in our ears these most blessed words, " Salvation is of the Lord." And this voice reaches us from the very belly of hell. " 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. 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 bottom of the mountains: the earth with her bars was about me forever: yet hast thou brought up my life from corruption, O Lord my God. 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. But I will sacrifice unto thee with the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay that I have vowed."

Here, then, we have profound exercises of soul. There is no superficial work in all this—no mere lip profession—no cold formal utterance of religious formularies—no empty generalities. All is intensely real. The soul is actually made to feel something of the awful reality of hell—to taste the bitterness and horror of the outside place—the anguish of being cast out of God's sight—the crushing weight of Jehovah's billows and waves—the very darkness and desolation of the pit of hell.

All this our blessed substitute entered into perfectly—entered into for us—entered into it that we might never know the reality of it. All praise to His peerless Name! He went down into the dust of death. He actually encountered all the billows and waves of God's righteous wrath against sin. He tasted the very bitterness and anguish of the forsaken place—that His people might never taste it. For this we praise Him, and shall praise Him through eternity's countless ages.

But who are they that can most fully and blessedly enter into the glorious result of those priceless sufferings of our adorable substitute? Those who, like Jonah, have entered most deeply into the reality of their condition as lost, ruined, guilty, undone—those who have been most thoroughly exercised in heart and conscience, under the powerful ministry of God the Holy Spirit, and thus brought to feel and own that they deserve nothing but the everlasting consumings of the wrath of God. We may rest assured of this that the more we feel how near we are to hell, the more we shall praise the grace that has rescued us—the more we realize how thoroughly we have earned for ourselves the wrath of a sin-hating God, the more we shall value and delight in His everlasting favor.

We greatly fear there is a vast amount of superficial work amongst us. Sin is not felt to be that horrible thing that it really is in the sight of God. It is not judged, in the conscience, with sufficient spiritual energy. Hence it is that so many who once seemed to have found peace in Jesus, go back to the world, and throw off even the very profession of Christ. They prove themselves to be merely stony-ground hearers—persons whose natural feelings were stirred under the word; but over whom the plow and the harrow had never really passed.

All this is deeply solemn. It demands the most serious attention of those engaged in the work of evangelization. It is not, need we say it? that the depth of our spiritual exercises has aught to do with our salvation. Most surely not. " Salvation is of the Lord," whether our exercises be deep or shallow. But we are most fully persuaded that those who undergo the deepest ploughings, under the mighty ministry of the eternal Spirit, make the most solid, steady, satisfactory Christians afterward. There is a deplorable amount of levity, indolence, and self-indulgence in our midst. We lack depth, seriousness, and self-judgment. It is to be feared that many of us are ready enough to accept salvation as a free gift, without entering, by the power of the Holy Ghost, into what it cost our precious Savior to make it thus free to us.

Hence it is that we can so readily trifle with sin—so easily make terms with the world—and take up with every vanity and folly that crosses our path. We cannot but believe that if the divine work in the conscience were of a deeper character, our whole christian career would exhibit far more holy gravity, steadiness, and consistency.

In short, we want to enter more fully into the power of the cross. We want to understand its application to our sinful nature, so that we may not so readily give a loose rein to that nature. There is this grand defect in much of our modern preaching and teaching, that the cross is presented as the means of forgiveness of sins; but it is not set forth as the condemnation of sin.

Now this is a very serious defect indeed; and its result is seen in the light, flippant, frivolous, airy-going style of many amongst us. We are saved from hell—fully, freely, perfectly saved. Thanks be to God for it. But is this all? Does God's salvation merely consist in delivering us from the eternal consequences of our sins? Is there no deliverance from the present power of sin? Yes, blessed be God, there is; for the selfsame cross that has blotted out our sins has condemned sin—crucified our old man—destroyed the body of sin—crucified us to the world, and crucified the world. to us.

Thus there are two sides to the great question of salvation, as there are two sides to that cross on which salvation rests. Should we not seek to know both sides? Should we rest in a one-sided view of such subject? Surely not. We ought diligently to seek a deeper knowledge, a more intense realization, a more practical sense of what is comprehended in that one. word " salvation," that so our entire course and character might, in a much fuller degree, adorn the doctrine of God. our Savior.

Reader, let us deeply ponder the two sides of God's salvation, the two sides of the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, the vast difference between the forgiveness of sins and the condemnation of sin.

Echoes of Grace: 1965, Jonah and the Whale

Skeptics who assail the truths and teachings of the Bible have always sought to place the account of "Jonah and the Whale" in the class of not only the probable, but of the impossible. The Scripture account says: "Now the LORD had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah." Jonah 1:17.

Note, the Bible narrative does not say that it was a whale, but a "great fish" prepared of God. Even those who claim that it would be impossible for a whale to swallow a man now have evidence against them. Among other instances, "The Literary Digest" of New York, in

Volume 12, No. 3, page 681, which was issued April 4, 1896, shows that even in comparatively recent years, whales have swallowed men.

In February, 1891, the "Star of the East," a whaling vessel cruising in the Mediterranean Sea, not greatly distant from the coast of Palestine, indeed, one might say in the very waters where Jonah was cast overboard, "launched two whaleboats with an equipment of men to pursue a superb whale that was observed at some distance. The huge creature was harpooned and wounded to death. While it was writhing in its last agonies, one of the whaleboats was struck by its tail and shattered to pieces. The sailors in it were thrown into the water. All but two were saved shortly by the other boat. The body of one was recovered, but the, other, James Bartley, could not be found.

“When the monster had ceased moving, and its death was quite certain, it was hoisted alongside the ship, and the work of cutting it up began. A day and a night were devoted to this task. When it was ended the stomach of the whale was opened. What was the surprise of the whalers to find in it their lost comrade, James Bartley, unconscious but alive! They had much trouble in reviving him. For several days he was delirious and could not speak an intelligent word. Not till three weeks had elapsed did he recover his reason and was able to narrate his impressions.”

James Bartley reported: "I remember well the moment the whale threw me into the air. Then I was swallowed and found myself enclosed in a firm, slippery channel whose contractions forced me continually downward. This lasted only an instant. Then I found myself in a very large sack, and by feeling about I realized that I had been swallowed by the whale and that I was in his stomach. I could still breathe, though with much difficulty. I had a feeling of insupportable heat, and it seemed as if I were being boiled alive. The horrible thought came to me: Was I doomed to perish in the whale's stomach? My anguish was intensified by the complete silence that reigned about me. Finally I lost consciousness of my frightful situation.”

James Bartley, the English papers said in the accounts published at that time, was known to be the most hardy of whalers, but the experience in the whale's stomach was so terrible that he was obliged to undergo treatment in a London hospital on his return. Nevertheless, his general state of health was not seriously affected by the incident, the only effect being that his skin was, as it were, tanned by the action of the gastric juices.

The captain of the "Star of the East" reports that cases where furious whales have swallowed men are not rare, but that this was the first time he ever saw the victim come out alive after his experience.

It is not necessary, in order to disprove the contention of the adversaries of Scripture, to show that the swallowing of Jonah by a great fish, or by a whale, was ordinarily possible. Even if we admit their contention, it only heightens the manifestation of divine power when we lift the whole subject into the realm of the miraculous. Would it not be ridiculous to deny that God, the Almighty Creator, could in this instance make an exception and create a "great fish" for a special purpose?

If man, with his limited capacities and powers, can build ships in which to transport live cattle from one continent to another; if, with ingenuity that is only human, he is able to construct boats that, at will, can either float upon the surface or sink beneath the waves, ships that can be navigated under the direction of the human will of those who are being preserved and whose bodies are being transported beneath the waves by their own skilful devices, would it not be both absurd and ridiculous to deny the Infinite, All-Wise and Almighty Creator, the power which He exercised in the preservation, transportation, and safe delivery of His prophet, that he might do the divine bidding and save the multitudes who dwelt in the city of Nineveh?

“Now the LORD had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah." Jonah 1:17.

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