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SERMON BY MR. H. DAWSON

(Jonah II. 7)

Sermon preached at "Ebenezer" Chapel, Hastings,
by Mr. H. DAWSON, on Wednesday evening, 15th July, 1953.

TEXT: *Jonah II. 7.*

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

THIS is a word which stands in connection with a solemn chapter in the life of Jonah; and it is a mercy to prize that the word of God contains the Book of Jonah. "Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope;" (Rom. xv. 4) and since Jonah's day many sinners who have had the mercy to be taught of God have known what it is to have a fainting soul, and have had to realize that they have been reaping in accordance with what they have sown, and have been brought very low in their souls' experience, as poor Jonah was. How good it has been then to remember that Jonah's God is indeed a God ready to pardon! It may be at this time some of you gathered together, desiring to worship God aright, if the truth could be told, you are here with a fainting soul, like dear Jonah long ago. It might be well to ask a question or two in approaching the subject, as the Lord shall help me.

If you are here with a fainting soul, it will be well for you to be exercised as to the why and wherefore of it. Jonah felt in his fainting soul to be in the belly of hell, and great was his guiltiness before God as he lamented his conduct which brought him there. There is this word to consider concerning Jonah, "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. But Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the Lord." A godly man like Jonah was disobedient, and thought his own thoughts about what God had bidden him to do, and determined to do otherwise. Are any of you here behaving like Jonah did long ago, and in some specific matter which God has allowed to come into your life you are doing as he did, and not humbling yourself under the mighty hand of God in what He has bidden you to do? People taught of God down through the ages have been too often Jonah-like. The word of the Lord does not come to them as it did to Jonah, "Arise, go here, or there, and preach;" although it has come to some people taught of God to do that. You may have had come into your life some great sorrow, some disappointment, some cup which God has mingled with many bitters at the first tasting of it, an affliction that is laid on you, or there is a hospital ward awaiting for you to be laid in awhile, or there has been a bereavement, and you have stood by a grave, and seen someone near and dear laid therein; and as yet you are like Jonah so long ago,—you are in a sad, self-pitying, diso-

bedient, rebellious frame of mind, and you are fleeing from the presence of the Lord therein. O, how good it is when grace is given to a sinner along life's way, as something comes upon him that has been unlooked-for,—some fiery trial, when all that one is by nature is quiescent, and grace superabounds over it, and you can feel, "It is the Lord: let Him do what seemeth Him good," and remember: "The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord, and he delighteth in his way" (Ps. xxxvii. 23). One can then say,

"Let but my fainting heart be blessed
With Thy sweet Spirit for its guest,
O God, to Thee I leave the rest;
Thy will be done!"

I had not thought of beginning to preach like that, but in approaching the subject, let us look a little at the setting of it and watch the dealings of God with Jonah.

Jonah was ordained of God to be a prophet; and he had a "thus saith the Lord" for the work which God had given him to do. And it ill became Jonah to behave like he did when the word of the Lord came unto him, "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it." Jonah was an Israelite, an Israelite indeed; and it is evident that he was a great patriot, and being an Israelite, and remembering that the Ninevites were Israel's inveterate enemies;—"Go and preach to the Ninevites?" says Jonah; "no! no!" "But Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the Lord." Alas, poor Jonah! I sometimes think those of us who desire to preach the gospel, wherever God ordains that we shall go, do need more and more His divine aid to make our engagements to preach. I sometimes tell my own dear people that the words "God willing" on our anniversary announcements ought to be in the largest letters thereon, because they are of unspeakable importance. What the will of God is is what will do poor sinners good, and what men God sends to preach must do, and not what they think about it. Jonah had his own thoughts about going to Nineveh to preach, and he found it a solemn business to turn his back on his commission to preach the gospel there. I will not take up time in going into the details, for you are all familiar with them. Jonah, at length, in fleeing from the presence of the Lord, found he was in the whale's belly; and not only so: Jonah tells us, "Out of the belly of hell cried I." That was where Jonah felt to be in his soul's experience because of his guiltiness before God, his disobedience. Yes, and in thinking his own thoughts as to what he should do in preaching the gospel, as it were, here or there. And what was underneath it all, if I understand it aright? Remember that Jonah was a man taught of God, and he would be well versed in the doctrines of our most holy faith, and he would know that the keystone in the arch of truth is the sovereignty of God; and yet when the word of the Lord came that he was to go and preach what God bade him to preach to the Ninevites, Jonah balked at it. Salvation for Israelites, yes! For Ninevites? No! I feel that was the work—

ing in Jonah's mind; and it is evident, because, when at length God dealt with poor Jonah, and he went from the whale's belly into the belly of hell, as it were, and learned his lesson there,—what was the truth that Jonah learned? What you would have thought he knew well as a prophet of the Lord:—"Salvation is of the Lord." Yes, Jonah, you had forgotten for the time being what your Lord said long before, "I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will shew mercy on whom I will shew mercy" (Ex. xxxiii. 19). That will be, my friends, not always those whom you think, be they ever so orthodox, but it will be many who are unorthodox, Israelites, Ninevites, barbarian, Scythian, bond, and free. Salvation is of the Lord, and it is for a number which no man can number, people of every kindred, tribe, and tongue.

So poor Jonah had to learn how he was to go forth to preach to the Ninevites by terrible things in righteousness; and in our text, which I desire to come to, you get what was going on between him and the Lord his God when he was down in the deeps. "When my soul fainted within me I remembered the Lord: and my prayer came in unto Thee, into Thine holy temple." I might add this, (this is good reading!) "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. So Jonah arose, and went unto Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord." I pause a moment to say this,—God grant it might be a word in season!—if God has said to any of you who have the mercy to be born again, some word,—some word for you to do this or that, and as yet you are disobedient and have not given heed to it, I would warn you. When the word of the Lord comes to you the second time God will repeat what He said the first time, and in between your disobeying what He said at the first and when at length you obey, (if all is well,) the second time, there will be not the whale's belly, but the belly of hell. Remember that!

"When my soul fainted within me I remembered the Lord." "My soul." It is a wonderful mercy to be a sinner born again, although with a fainting soul; because that is a soul alive. "The dead know not anything" of being faint. The psalmist said, "I opened my mouth, and panted." Yes, a soul that is fainting is one that is alive, and that is a mercy to prize. It can be said to such a one, "And you hath He quickened who were dead in trespasses and sins." (Eph. ii. 1). Here you are, Jonah-like, a poor sinner with a fainting soul. And now I want to look, as the Lord shall help me, at some of these things that cause a fainting soul in a sinner who has the mercy to be born again.

The things of God altogether, in their unspeakable importance, sometimes bring about a fainting soul. I mean, the magnitude of them, the worth of them, the amazing mercy to have a part and lot in them, and wonder if you have that mercy as yet, or whether you

will obtain it. The thought of not obtaining it will bring a fainting soul upon you.

"I cannot bear the piercing thought,
What if my name should be left out,
When Thou for them shalt call?"

Not to be found at length amongst the people of God with whom I love to be! To be with them in time, but not to be found where they are in eternity! O, that will bring a fainting soul!

Go back, if you can, (I leave the "if" with you,)—go back if you can to when you hope God began to deal with you, and what were the first feelings—I nearly said, reactions,—to when God began to deal with you? You felt then what you had never felt before, and you became the subject of a fainting soul. You had given no thought to your soul before; but when God, in His covenant mercy, began His good work in you, although you cannot say much about it as to when it was, or how, you began to feel as you had never felt before: "I have a never-dying soul. I am bound for an eternal destiny, either Heaven or hell." And feeling as you did, a sinner, laden with guilt, and realizing your hell-deserving state, you felt a fainting soul within. When conviction of sin is given as God gives it, "When He the Spirit of truth is come, He shall convince the world of sin;" and when that happens in a sinner's breast and he gets an opening up of what he is as a sinner, O, it makes that sinner have a fainting soul in the realization of it. "From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and putrefying sores" (Isa. i. 6). "Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips" (Is. vi. 5). When God begins to make known the plague of the heart, O, that same sinner may have sat in a pew in our causes somewhere all his or her life long, and heard the doctrine of it, and known about the Adam fall as a truth; but when that solemn "something" which must be known and felt is realized in a sinner's breast, then, then, there is a fainting soul. O, to realize where one is under the law, to appear before God as He is to be seen and known as it were at Sinai's mount, and to realize this, "If Thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?" (Ps. cxxx. 3). What doth the law say to the sinner born under it? (You and I were born under it!) "Pay me that thou owest; every jot and tittle."

"Righteousness to full perfection
Must be brought, lacking nought,
Fearless of rejection."

That same sinner may reform his life and struggle to do this and that if so be he can get together some righteousness, but with all that he does to obtain it, alas, he finds it is only regarded by Him, with Whom he has to do, as filthy rags; and he is under the law, and before God, with a solemn sense of his undone state,—and this brings about a fainting soul.

"If my soul is sent to hell,
Thy righteous law approves it well."

A very solemn experience it is! The psalmist says, "The pains of hell got hold upon me: I found trouble and sorrow" (Ps. cxvi. 3). And in this word before us, "When my soul fainted within me, I remembered the Lord."

It is a wonderful mercy when a poor sinner with a fainting soul under the law finds coming into his heart what the gospel is, "The light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ," and this word is made known, "Christ is the end of the law for righteousness for every one that believeth" (Rom. x. 4). Yes!

"Sinner, if thou art taught to see
How great thy guilt and misery,
In every thought and act impure,
The blood of Christ thy soul can cure."

Remember that! "He will regard the prayer of the destitute, and not despise their prayer" "To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at My word" (Is. lxvi. 2). Under the law, as a sinner is kept there awhile, he does know what it is to tremble at the word of the Lord as it is revealed therein: "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them" (Gal. iii. 10). "When my soul fainted within me I remembered the Lord."

Another cause, a very solemn cause of a fainting soul, arises from what you are by nature. You and I carry about what is very solemn to contemplate; I regard it as a terrible truth,— "The carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be" (Rom. viii. 7). What you are by nature at times churns you up, and it makes sad havoc with you. Your spiritual-mindedness, if you have known it a little, dies down. What you are by nature seems to predominate, and it undoes you in your profession of Jesus' Name, and when you are made aware of it, you find a fainting soul as the outcome of it. "The good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do . . . O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" (Rom. vii. 19, 24). "When my soul fainted within me I remembered the Lord," said dear Jonah long ago; and O that the blessed Spirit may help you also, who are Jonah-like and with a fainting soul arising from what you are by nature, to remember the Lord likewise! Go to Him like this.

"O crucify this self, that I
No more, but Christ in me may live;
Bid all my vile affections die,
Nor let one hateful lust survive."

You will have a fainting soul sometimes as you come into contact with the world, which you must do, many of you, to earn the bread which perisheth; and it does need much grace nowadays to be in the world and not of it. Everything in the world, as you go about in it, especially if you live a city life or town life, is so alluring to undo you. Through "Eye-gate," you can soon get a fainting soul,

and through "Ear-gate," too ; and you have to feel, "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" (Gal. v. 18). O, you do desire to be a pilgrim to Canaan bound, and to live a life of separation from the world ; but you find in everyday life that the world and the spirit of it begets in you a fainting soul, and you lament it.

"Save me from this bewitching world,
That has to death ten-thousand hurled."

"When my soul fainted within me." Everyday life with its wear and tear is very exacting nowadays. Think of godly fathers and mothers who have got the responsibilities of parenthood, and in such tremendous times as you and I are living in. There are the children God has given you to train up in the way that they should go ; and you are oftentimes lamenting with a fainting soul how little grace you possess to go in that way and set an example as you desire. You see the children growing up and having to leave the family circle and go here and there, (maybe on national service,) and you fear that the children are going to drop into an equivalent of hell on earth in an environment they have never known yet ; your fears run high as to how it will be with them when they go here and there ; and you have a fainting soul in thinking upon it. The relationships of life bring their corresponding responsibilities, and in seeking to live in accordance with those responsibilities you will often find a fainting soul coming upon you. Maybe, at the end of the day, when you weigh matters up and think of what you have been in your everyday life, desiring to be, as I said, a godly father or mother, you can only come to this conclusion, "God be merciful to me a sinner ; a sinner with a fainting soul. And it is good to remember the Lord like that. "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners," and it means sinners who are aware that they possess fainting souls, like you.

"When my soul fainted within me I remembered the Lord." You may have a fainting soul because matters are not with you nowadays as they used to be in things divine. Your religion seemed to be much more lively years ago, and you had much more nearness to God than you do nowadays. What has happened ? It might be well to weigh that up as before God. Have you been doing what Jonah did in some sense of the word,—fleeing from the presence of the Lord in some matter, and as yet you still remain disobedient, rebellious, about it ? You have a fainting soul because, nowadays, you walk in darkness and have no light, and yet in bygone experiences you can remember that you lived near to God, and could sometimes rejoice in hope of life eternal ; but nowadays you feel, "As for my hope, who shall see it ? Mine hope hath He removed like a tree" (Job xvii. 15 ; xix. 10). And you have a fainting soul. The mercy is that you *do* have a fainting soul when you weigh these matters up, and that is because you are, as I said at the outset, a soul alive. Your

help is to come through this blessed remedy which is revealed in the word of God : "When my soul fainted within me I remembered the Lord." Yes ! "Who can tell but what God will be gracious unto you ?" Go to Him like the psalmist, "Wilt Thou not revive us again, that Thy people may rejoice in Thee ?" There is hope concerning such a case in the word of God in a striking word which I like to look at : "I will restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten, the cankerworm, and the caterpillar, and the palmerworm, My great army which I sent among you" (Joel ii. 25). "I will see you again," the Lord Jesus said, "and your heart shall rejoice."

"All thy wastes I will repair ;
Thou shalt be rebuilt anew ;
And in thee it shall appear
What the God of love can do."

"When my soul fainted within me I remembered the Lord."

But there may be one in this assembly,—I should rather judge there is,—one with a fainting soul because of being a long while in a backsliding state. I am not fitting caps on ; I am drawing a bow at a venture. Many people taught of God nowadays, if they told the truth, are oft times in a backsliding state, and there may be one in this assembly with a fainting soul, a backslider in heart who has long been filled with his own ways, and has been reaping O, so solemnly, the harvest in accordance with the seed sown. And now there is a word which I like to look at, which is very, very encouraging. It is found in that wondrous prayer that Solomon was inspired of God to offer up when the temple was dedicated, and he speaks there of one in a backsliding state, and he words it like this, "If they sin against Thee, (for there is no man that sinneth not,) and Thou be angry with them, and deliver them over before their enemies, and they carry them away captives unto a land far off or near ;"—here is a wonderful word !—"Yet if they bethink themselves in the land whither they are carried captive . . ." And then lower down in the chapter, "Then hear Thou . . . their prayer and their supplications, and maintain their cause, and forgive" (II Chron. vi. 36, 37, 39). God is just like that ! "Return unto Me, and I will return unto you." Think of this word, poor sinner with a fainting soul because of being in a backsliding state,—do you "bethink" yourself ? A very suggestive word ! The marginal reading is, "If they shall bring back to their heart." Do you lie awake at night sometimes and toss on your bed, and call to remembrance the former days ?—and now you are at the ends of the earth, and in some sense of the word you may be even in the belly of hell, because you have sinned against light and knowledge, too, and now you have a fainting soul. The Lord bless you ! Remember, there is hope in Israel concerning this thing. There is an amazing word in Jeremiah's prophecy. Look it up. "Only acknowledge thine iniquity," says the Lord our God to Israel in their backsliding state ; "only acknowledge thine iniquity.

—I will blot it out ; your sins, your iniquities, I will remember no more." I say, God is just like that ! "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (I John i. 9). "No sinner was ever yet empty sent back, who came seeking mercy for Jesus' sake."

Sometimes you have a fainting soul because of your cross. Is it *your* cross ? Think of a word penned to the church at Philippi long ago, and also the truth that you and I should consider, too ; if it is our mercy to be taught of God : "Not only is it given unto you to believe on His Name, but also to suffer for *His sake*" (Phil. i. 29). "Whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after Me, cannot be My disciple" (Luke xiv. 27). But when you look at your cross sometimes and do not remember it is *His* cross also,—what I mean is, His choice of a cross for you,—you have a fainting soul at the sight of your cross, and you say,

"I cannot well abide
The cross's galling load ;
Too oft I start aside,
And murmur against my God."

"When my soul fainted within me." If you could only realize it, it is a wonderful mercy to have a cross to take up every day ; and sometimes to feel this,

"'Tis my happiness below,
Not to live without the cross,
But the Saviour's power to know,
Sanctifying every loss."

"Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you ; but rejoice, *inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings*" (I Pet. iv. 12, 13). A privilege to be prized ! No cross, no crown.

"When my soul fainted within me I remembered the Lord." I must come along toward the Amen ; but I want to say this, you may have a fainting soul, some of you, as you think of the future. The future in the world about us is very dark and threatening. Men's hearts everywhere are failing them for fear as they survey the things which are coming on the earth. If you should be taught of God, even as godly Jonah was, and carry about a fainting soul when you think of the future, do remember how dear Jonah behaved : "When my soul fainted within me I remembered the Lord." "The Lord reigneth." "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever."

"In heaven, and earth, and air, and seas,
He executes His firm decrees."

But though His methods are unknown,
Judgment and truth support His throne."

You say, "O, but it is not so much the future as I see it in the world about me. I am old and grey-headed, and I am going down, down, to the end of life's journey. What then ? Shall I find the bottom

good in Jordan's swelling ? Shall I find then I have indeed some religion to die by ? Alas, I often have a fainting soul in thinking upon it."

"My fears sometimes say I never shall find,
In death's gloomy day, true peace to my mind."

"When my soul fainted within me I remembered the Lord." Listen ! "Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He also Himself likewise took part of the same ; that through death He might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil ; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage" (Héb. ii. 14, 15). Here is a blessed antidote for your fainting soul as you survey the future ; and then it will be a future, dark as the outlook is, in a gilded frame, so that you may feel, come what will, it shall be well. "It shall be well with them that fear God."

"When my soul fainted within me I remembered the Lord." I wish I had a little time to say something about this blessed antidote for a fainting soul : "I remembered the Lord," said dear Jonah long ago. And what had Jonah said concerning the Lord his God ? O, he speaks like this, "I knew that Thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness." "I remembered the Lord." O that you may have grace given to you to do it ! Remember Who He is, verily God, verily Man.

"Whom, though we cannot comprehend,
Knowing Thou art the sinner's Friend,
We love Thee, and adore."

Remember that this great God is approachable. *You are welcome* to knock at mercy's door with your fainting soul. Remember that ! "Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out." "I remembered the Lord." Remember the throne of grace whereon He reigns and rules. "Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need" (Héb. iv. 16). Remember the word of God, with its exceeding great and precious promises, all Yea and Amen in Christ Jesus (II Cor. i. 20) ; and you will find some, too, to fit in with your fainting soul, to encourage you to hope in God. And remember there is a fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness, though you be even more guilty than Jonah was. Remember, the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanseth us from all sin.

"The blood of Christ, O precious blood !
Cleanses from all sin ; (doubt it not !)
And reconciles the soul to God
From every folly, every fault."

"When my soul fainted within me I remembered the Lord." There is this thought which is helpful to dwell on as the Lord shall make it alive in you,—has the Lord done anything for you hitherto ? You have *now* a fainting soul ; but then, what has God done for your soul already ? Look back along life's way ; think on the

Ebenzers and Hill Mizars you have set up ; think how you have been made to differ from the world at large, given an aching void which the world cannot fill. Think, too, how you *have* been made welcome at the throne of grace in bygone experiences. God *has* regarded you and your petitions alike, and if you tell the truth you could say,

“ That Christ is God I can avouch,
And for His people cares,
Since I have prayed to Him as such,
And He has heard my prayers.”

And look back and remember when you have found Jesus Christ to be precious as all your salvation and all your desire, and remember all that you can look back on along life's way, which you hope God has done for your soul, remains a blessed reality, though at the present time you have a fainting soul, and hardly know what you are or where you are.

“ His love in time past forbids you to think
He'll leave you at last in trouble to sink.”

You have a fainting soul, it is true, but you shall not die. Weak as you are, far off as you are, the Lord will appear. Yes ! “ Because I live, ye shall live also.” He is Jehovah-rophi, “ the Lord which healeth.” Look how Jonah's God dealt with him, base and bad as he was in his behaviour. I know the book of Jonah makes very sad reading, especially when you come to the conclusion of it. Have you ever thought of this,—who do you think wrote the book of Jonah ? The Holy Spirit inspired it, but who put it down in black and white ? It says, The Book of Jonah. Jonah told all the truth about his own behaviour ; and that must have been because he obtained mercy and could rejoice in it, and the Lord made him put the record down to encourage other poor sinners with their fainting souls who would behave like him in days to come.

“ When my soul fainted within me I remembered the Lord ; and *my prayer* came in unto Thee.” Remember what Jonah's prayer must have been like in the belly of hell in his soul's experience, and in the whale's belly, too. Not much eloquence about it, but a great deal of earnest, solemn reality. Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth was speaking. But it was a sigh, a groan. “ Out of the belly of hell cried I, and Thou heardest my voice.” “ My prayer came in unto Thee.” Now that should encourage you about *your* prayer. Your prayer will come in, too, with your fainting soul, when you are helped to do what Jonah did : “ I remembered the Lord.”

“ Approach my soul, the mercy-seat,
Where Jesus answers prayer ;
There humbly fall before His feet,
For none can perish there.”

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