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Sermon preached by Mr. J. Raven at Shaw's Corner, Redhill,
on Sunday evening, February 17th 1952.

"Then I said, I am cast out of thy sight; yet I will look again
toward thy holy temple". Jonah 2. v.4

A very remarkable history we have recorded in this book of Jonah. This history of Jonah is among the things which are written for our learning and for our admonition. It is full of instruction for the people of God and full of admonition.

We read here of Jonah receiving a command from God, "Arise go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it". Nineveh was truly a great city, "an exceeding great city of three days' journey", yet the time came when the city was completely wiped out, no trace of it remained, and then was fulfilled the word by Nahum the prophet when he said that the question would be asked, "Where is the dwelling of the lions, and the feeding place of the young lions?", meaning Nineveh, the great city from which bands of men went forth to other countries to kill and to rob, to spoil and desolate, as lions go to seek their prey. It seemed impossible at that day that so great a city could be brought so completely to nothing, yet so it was, though men in these latter days cavil at the Scriptures, and at this book of Jonah, saying it was nothing but imagination, there never was such a city as Nineveh. Yet some years ago, by the goodness of God, a gentleman travelling in those parts was interested in some mounds that were there in a desert place. He felt from what he had studied of the subject that that was probably the site of the city of Nineveh. Excavation work was begun and the city of Nineveh was brought to light, so the Higher Critics were proved to be wrong and the Scriptures were proved to be right. There was a city, a great city called Nineveh, and the time did come that the question would be asked, "Where is the dwelling of the lions", where is Nineveh?

Well, Jonah was commanded to go to this great city and cry against it. What a task for a poor, weak man! A man who was a stranger in the place to go to it and cry against it! I do not wonder that Jonah did what he did, for left to himself he was nothing but fears. What else was he likely to do, and would you and I do any better? I dare say we have shrunk from far smaller tasks than this that was set before Jonah. I dare say there have been some very small matters that have been set before us as our duty that we have shrunk from, so we have no reason to throw stones at Jonah. Jonah sought to flee from the presence of

the Lord. What a base thought, what a foolish thought! what ignorance it displayed of the omnipresence and the omniscience of God! You remember the Psalmist in Psalm 139 spoke of the impossibility of escaping the presence of God. "If I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there". There was no place where he could go and find refuge from the all-seeing eye of God, so it was a foolish thing for Jonah to think that he could flee from the presence of the Lord. Yet it might have appeared to him that he was doing perfectly right, because he went down to Joppa and there he found a ship going to Tarshish, the very place he wanted to go to, and I should not wonder if Jonah deceived himself by saying, 'Ah, the Lord evidently means that I am to go to Tarshish and not to Nineveh, because here is the ship ready to go to the very place, and I have the means to pay the fare'. So Jonah paid his fare and entered the ship and commenced the voyage, but then God sent out a great wind into the sea. God has all forces at His command; all nature is obedient to Him. He holds the wind in His fist and the waters in the hollow of His hand. "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". Ah, there was the manifest presence of God, there was the solemn presence of God, and yet amidst all that Jonah was so hardened in his rebellion and his unbelief that he went down into the side of the ship and lay and was fast asleep. Is it not amazing that even a child of God could be in such a state when under the judgments of God, when the strokes of God are upon him, that he could be so dreadfully indifferent? Jonah was fast asleep; the mariners were stirred, they displayed more sensibility than Jonah did, and the ship-master 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". It is a sad thing when the ungodly are used to rebuke a child of God, and yet so it is at times. Yet sometimes we may have been thankful ultimately for a rebuke or a searching word administered to us by the mouth of an ungodly man. I remember my old pastor, when he was an officer in the Army, having made some profession of religion, one day reproved a brother officer for making some unseemly remarks. The man retorted, 'As for you, you profess what you know nothing about'. That was made of immense use to Mr. Hazlerigg. It set him to some heart searching and to some enquiry as to where he really stood. God used it for his profit, and it may be that some of us have had some similar experience, that God had spoken by the lips of ungodly people in such a way as to stir us up very similarly to some enquiry as to where we really stood. "What meanest thou, O sleeper? arise, call upon thy God,

if so be that God will think upon us that we perish not". Then we read how they cast lots, "That we may know for whose cause this evil is upon us." So they cast lots, and the lot fell upon Jonah. "They 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 heaven, which had 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. 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." Now the man is awakened somewhat to the solemnity of his position, and eventually the mariners, after offering a remarkable prayer to Jehovah, took up Jonah and cast him into the sea, "and the sea ceased from her raging. Then the men feared Jehovah exceedingly and offered a sacrifice unto Jehovah and made vows".

A remarkable result - it was a strange missionary journey. The Lord used his disobedient servant to bring these men to fear His name and to worship Him. Now we read another remarkable thing. "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". O how this narrative has been pulled to pieces by those who call themselves the Higher Critics. 'Impossible', say they. 'Impossible. There is no fish in the sea, certainly no whale in the sea that can swallow a man". And yet it is a proven fact that there is a certain type of whale that can swallow immense portions, and that has vomited up pieces as large as a piano. Sidney Collett, in his book "The Scriptures of Truth" relates that a German sailor employed on a whaling vessel was swept overboard one day, and he found himself in the belly of a great fish. This fish was quickly caught and when they had opened it they found the man alive, still alive, and his life was spared; for several days he was in a deranged condition, and his skin was the colour of parchment, but he eventually recovered and went about Germany, his native country, to testify of the wonderful thing that had happened to him. It is remarkable how God does supply proof, from time to time, of the truth of His Word. Well, Jonah was in the belly of the fish for three days and three nights. Some may say again, 'impossible', but the next chapter reveals a greater wonder even than that. It was a wonderful

thing for Jonah to be kept alive in the belly of the fish for three days and three nights, but yet more wonderful for him to pray in such a position. I think that this prayer and the prayer of David in the 51st Psalm are two wonderful miracles recorded in the Scriptures. It was a wonderful miracle that a man in David's case should pray as he did, and that Jonah in such a position as he was in should pray as he did was a wonderful miracle. O what almighty grace can do! "Then Jonah prayed unto the Lord his God" - I like that - his God still. Poor Jonah had been very disobedient and very foolish, but God was his God still. "The Lord hath not cast off His people". 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". This place that he was in was as the belly of hell to him. "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". You notice he says, "thy billows" and "thy waves". "Then I said I am cast out of thy sight, yet I will look again toward thy holy temple".

"Then I said, I am cast out of thy sight". What a plight for the man to be in! One is reminded here of David's plea, "Cast not me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy Spirit from me". He felt he richly deserved to be for ever cast out from the presence of God, and yet he was given grace to plead, "Cast me not away from thy presence, take not thy holy Spirit from me". Here Jonah says, "I am cast out of thy sight, yet I will look again toward thy holy temple". Now these words of Jonah, so eloquent of his desperate case and his need, are often fitted to the cases and experiences of God's people. "Then I said, I am cast out of thy sight". I believe God's people get into some very desperate places at times through their pride, their unbelief, their folly; their waywardness, their rebellion, their idolatry and many other things that they are entangled by, and they get into some desperate plights and sometimes in their feelings are in the very belly of hell. one says,

"To endless death I seem consigned,
So destitute of cheering hope".

"Then I said, I am cast out of thy sight". Have you ever felt anything like that, that you were one whom God had cast out of His sight? You could not pray, and you could not read the Scriptures with any feeling, with any comfort. You read the Scriptures with nothing but hardness of heart, with unbelief working within you. You try to pray and your mind is all in confusion, you have no access. You are shut up and

cannot come forth. A terrible place to be in! Well, Jonah said, "I am cast out of thy sight", and it seems just like that at times as if the heavens are brass over head. "I cry and shout and he shutteth out my prayer", said the man of God. "I am cast out of thy sight". My guilt, my folly, my sins and the pride of my heart, my wretched unbelief - what painful cutting reflections some poor people have found. "I am cast out of thy sight", and the fear is that God will never regard the man with favour and tender mercy again, "destitute of cheering hope". "Yet", (there are some wonderful 'yets' in the Scriptures) "yet I will look again toward thy holy temple". "Yet I will look again" - desperate as the case is, hopeless as it seems to be in itself, "Yet I will look again", covered as I am with guilt and shame, "Yet I will look again". Who can tell but the Lord may turn again and have mercy upon me, Who can tell but the Lord may return unto me with love and reconciliation and mercy? "Yet I will look again."

Well, these words carry us back to Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the Temple, when you remember, he laid before the Lord a variety of cases, cases of necessity, the case of Israel when pressed by their enemies, cases of pestilence and drought, the case of the man who knows his own sore and the plague of his own heart, the case of people who had sinned and for their sins were banished to a far country, and many other cases did Solomon bring before the Lord, saying, "Then hear Thou from heaven thy dwelling place: and when Thou hearest forgive", and maintain their cause, etc. Then there is a word concerning the stranger "which is not of thy people Israel"; O, there is something so encouraging in that prayer! It was a prayer of which the Lord signified His acceptance, and evidently Jonah had that in mind when he said, "Yet I will look again toward thy holy temple." You remember Daniel, when he was in captivity in Babylon, three times a day opened his window toward Jerusalem and prayed toward that holy temple. Solomon said, "if they pray toward this place, and confess thy name, and turn from their sin, when thou doest afflict them, then hear thou from heaven, and forgive". So Daniel prayed with his face turned toward that holy temple at Jerusalem, and that temple, you remember, is a type of the Lord Jesus Christ.

"Is He a Temple, I adore
The indwelling majesty and power;
And still to his most holy place,
Whene'er I pray, I'll turn my face".

Christ is the only hope of a poor sinner's acceptance with God, it is only through Christ that prayer can ascend to the Father and blessings come down from the Father's hand into the sinner's bosom.

"Jesus is the way to God;
Jesus is the way to bliss;
In this way the church has trod,
Down from Adam's day to this".

"Yet I will look again toward thy holy temple". O, how this sets the Lord Jesus Christ before the eyes of His poor people in their various conditions, in their sad distresses, in their temptations, when immersed in sin and shame, when Jonah-like they fled from Him and rebelled against His Word and brought themselves into distress, "Yet I will look again toward thy holy temple". "Look unto Me", says the Lord, "and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else". Jonah tells us further, "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". These words, so descriptive of Jonah's case, are so fitted to the feelings of a poor sinner who is under conviction, consciously under condemnation. I know these words were eminently suited to describe my case in my early days, when I was a wretched, guilty sinner in my soul's feelings. I am a sinner still, but in those days it was a new discovery to me and one cannot describe the anguish and the feeling of soul despair that one was the subject of. One felt that indeed "the weeds were wrapped about my head", the weeds of one's own sins, one's dreadful corruptions, one's folly and unbelief. "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". I have thought sometimes of some of those smooth and easy professors, who seem to go on without a ripple on the surface, that a good part of the Bible must be without meaning to them. For instance, this passage that we are considering at the moment must be without any significance to these people, they have no use for it - it is only a story about Jonah, it is just what happened to Jonah, what Jonah felt, but it has nothing to do with them. But I cannot say that it has been so with myself, for I have found my own case wonderfully portrayed in these words in which Jonah describes his condition. Here is another wonderful 'yet', "Yet has thou brought up my life from corruption". "When my soul fainted within me", when there was a dreadful realisation of the hopelessness of his condition, "I remembered the Lord: and my prayer came in unto thee, into thine holy temple". O, you think of it, think of where Jonah was, the predicament he was in, and yet he was helped to pray even from the belly of the whale, and his prayer entered into God's holy temple.

Then he says, "They that observe lying vanities forsake their own

mercy". Jonah learnt some great lessons in this experience, and this is one thing that he testifies to, that "they that observe lying vanities forsake their own mercy". This is a truth we shall do well to reflect upon because such is the waywardness of our hearts that we are very prone to observe lying vanities. Can you say that you have never observed lying vanities, that your eye has never been caught away by the lying vanities of this present evil world? "They that observe lying vanities forsake their own mercy". When you turn aside to indulge in the friendship of the world and in the pleasures of this world, when you turn away from the things of God and from the truth of God to worldly things, you forsake your own mercy. I knew a good man whose sister forsook the truth and the man said to her, 'If you forsake truth you forsake life'. That was a very true statement and in harmony with what we read here. "They that observe lying vanities forsake their own mercy. But I will sacrifice unto thee with the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay that that I have vowed. Salvation is of the Lord". Here is another lesson that Jonah learned - "Salvation is of the Lord", and we note it was all from the hand of God. The hand of God in raising the wind, causing the storm to rage on the sea, and the hand of God in causing it to cease; the hand of God in preparing the fish and the hand of God when the time came that He spake unto the fish and it vomited Jonah up on to the dry land. The hand of God is seen all through and yet Jonah had to learn other lessons, he still needed to be instructed, he was still a sinner, he was still a poor man prone to err.

"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" - "the preaching that I bid thee". "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. 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". Bishop Latimer the martyr, in one of his sermons spoke of this as a nipping sermon, a pinching and a biting sermon. It had a full bite. It was no grand clerkly sermon. It was "Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown, Latimer spoke of the wonderful result of it, that under this preaching of Jonah, although it was only this, "Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown" repeated over and over again, Nineveh was smitten and brought to repentance. 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". We are not to understand here godly repentance, but such a repentance as even natural men are capable of being brought to, and when natural men repent as Ahab did when he clothed himself with sackcloth and walked softly, the Lord regards it. The Lord did not depart from the word He had spoken against Ahab and his sons, judgment ultimately fell upon him, but for the time being the judgment of God was suspended. And so here, 'For word came unto the king in Nineveh, and he arose from the 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?" So Nineveh repented at the preaching of Jonah, and God "saw their works, that they turned from their way; and he did it not." His judgment for the time being was suspended. Then we read that this "displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was very angry". It looks as if his pride was hurt, and he merited rebuke from God. "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. 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? 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. 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 was determined to teach Jonah a lesson by means of this gourd. God prepared a worm - you see again and again, God prepared, God prepared, it is the Lord's doing here, remember. "But God prepared a worm when the morning rose the next day, and it smote the gourd that it withered". You see it is a remarkable fact to observe that the goodness of God extends even to worms, and even to the meanest of His creatures; there is not a creature great or small but is perfectly known in all its movements unto God. "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". We here see to what extremes even a man of God can go if left to himself, and this is written for our instruction and admonition, that we may learn from this what we are capable of if left to ourselves, and what, left to ourselves, we should come to. There is only one thing that can stand in our favour and that is, "Salvation is of the Lord". O, if we have an interest in His great salvation happy, happy are we. "Happy is that people, whose God is the Lord" and "whose hope the Lord is".

Well, may the Lord grant an attentive ear that what we have been considering may be of some use to us for our profitable instruction and admonition, and especially the remembrance of this that Jonah cried unto the Lord out of the belly of hell. He says, "I am cast out of thy sight; yet I will look again toward thy holy temple". His soul fainted within him, he remembered the Lord and his prayer came into His holy temple, and he proved that "Salvation is of the Lord". One of our hymn writers beautifully says,

"Salvation's of the Lord alone,
Grace is a shoreless sea".

May the Lord command His blessing, Amen.

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