

JONAH

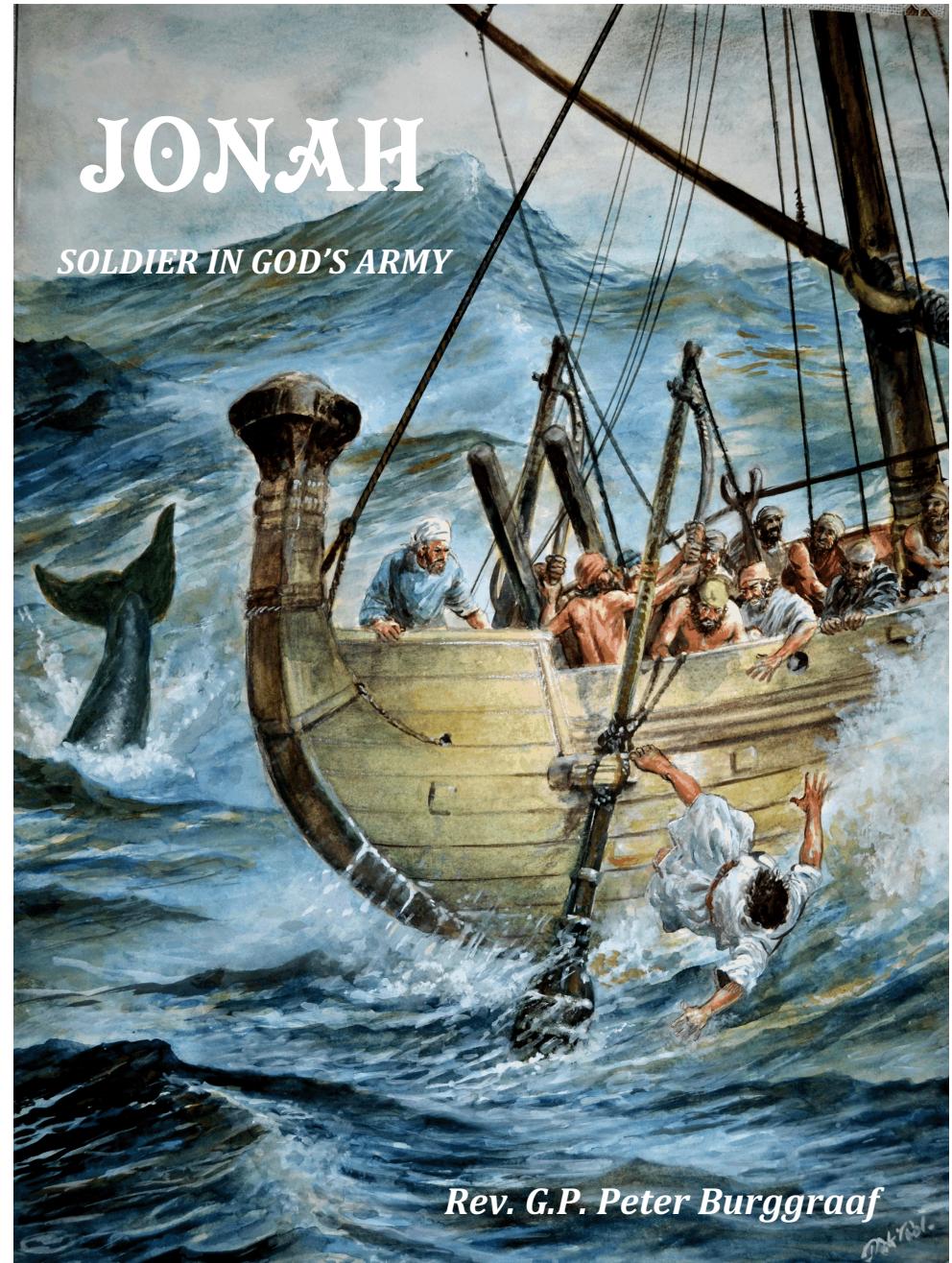
SOLDIER IN GOD'S ARMY

THE GREAT REVIVAL
AMONG THE HEATHEN IN NINEVEH

Jonah's mission among the heathen in Nineveh is certainly one of the most wonderful and fruitful missions in history. Despite human weakness and unwillingly on Jonah's side, God's Name is glorified in His sovereign dealings with Nineveh by means of the preaching of Jonah. In this book the author describes that Jonah's mission is still relevant to our times, for Christ only died for the ungodly! (Rom. 5:6). God continues His work to save sinners until the end of the world. The fields are ready to harvest, but there are few workers. However, God is able to save sinners through few or many. We see this with Jonah, whom God uses as a means in His hands for the conversion of the king and all the inhabitants of Nineveh. That God is still alive! Before Christ appears on the clouds, a great spiritual revival will come among Jews and Gentiles!

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Rev. G.P. Peter Burggraaf

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by

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PREFACE

Let us use as a preface to this reprinted book of the prophet Jonah the following parts of Holy Scripture: "*I say then, Have they stumbled that they should fall? God forbid: but rather through their fall salvation is come unto the Gentiles, for to provoke them to jealousy*", Romans 11:11.

"For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in. And so all Israel shall be saved; as it is written: "There shall come out of Zion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob: For this is My covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins", Romans 11:25-27.

In this book we meet the unwilling prophet Jonah who is sent by God to the Gentiles in Nineveh, to preach the destruction of the city. However, Jonah declined the calling of the LORD and went his own way by taking a ship to Tarshish. But the LORD created a huge storm on the sea, so that Jonah confessed to the sailors that he was the guilty one. Then Jonah was thrown overboard into the sea, but the LORD provided a living submarine to deliver Jonah at his destination, by spewing Jonah on the beach of to the city of Nineveh. Jonah's preaching sounded as follows, "*Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown.*" At least Jonah saw that the effect of his preaching among the heathen was like an abundant rain, not because of Jonah's willingness, but because of God's eternal decision. Let us pray for such a revival in our days, both among Jews and Gentiles, for what the Gentiles in Nineveh needed, we all need if it is to be well for time and eternity. I hope and pray this booklet of Jonah may be blessed to the glory of God's holy Name and to the salvation of a multitude of lost sinners.

*Burgessville - Ontario, April 2003,
Rev. G. P. Peter Burggraaf*

1. JONAH'S FLIGHT

Many people are familiar with the story of the prophet Jonah. It is one of the most wonderful stories in the Bible. Jonah, who wanted to go his own way, eventually did come to where God had destined him to be, even though God's way led literally through the Mediterranean. In this story two things demand our attention:

- 1. The most miraculous mission-trip of all time***
- 2. The greatest spiritual awakening in history***

The remarkable voyage which Jonah experienced partly due to his own fault is, however, contrary to our human thinking. This is also true of the divine truths and the wonderful life of faith. True faith is never to be comprehended by the mind. It is God's free gift. In the story of Jonah it is clearly revealed that God is not a God of that which is difficult, but of that which is impossible. The way by which Jonah arrived at Nineveh is a miracle which passes all understanding. For that reason Higher Criticism has degraded the book of Jonah to a kind of legend to which it attaches no more value than to the average comic strip. We may call it a miracle when this kind of thinking does not dominate our secularized brains, for we live in a time in which even many church-goers doubt the historicity of the Bible, let alone recognize the Canonicity of all Scriptures, and that one must live by a true saving faith. This faith is attacked and assaulted both from within and from without. We will also see this in the life of Jonah.

From beginning to end the story of Jonah is part of the holy and infallible Word of God which the holy men wrote down through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. God's Word has been inspired word for word, from Genesis 1 to Revelation 22, although this is questioned and indeed openly denied by many so-called *Reformed* theologians. And though the authors of the Bible were no mechanical instruments in God's hands and God's Word has been organically inspired, nevertheless each word in the original text has been inspired by the Holy Spirit, as 2 Timothy 3 verse 16 says: "*All Scripture is given by inspiration of God.*" To speak with all reverence, the Holy Spirit was no Spectator when the Bible was written in the original

language. Nor was He a Guide, but He was the Author! This also applies to the wonderful book of Jonah. The Holy Ghost was in full control of the authors of the Bible, not as slaves but as living instruments, prepared and made willing for His ministry. God used the authors of the Bible in His service without making use of any human addition. He that is able to understand, understand.

But throughout the centuries men have always been trying to explain God's Word and its divine authority according to human standards and narrow-minded theories, which, however, has nothing to do with "being taught of God."

Not one jot or tittle of God's everlasting testimony will fall to the earth until all these things have passed. God Himself upholds His Word of which Luther once testified: "*The Word of God will stand for ever and ever and will not budge an inch.*"

The book of Jonah has a threefold meaning. Firstly to make us know who God is. Secondly to give us a picture of who man is, even after grace received. Finally it contains a typological reference to Christ and the living Church.

Jonah lived from 824 till 783 B.C. He was the first Jewish missionary who was sent to the heathen. The effect of his preaching was like an abundant rain. Jonah was a "John the Baptist" for the heathen. Christ's coming in the flesh was to take away the middle wall of partition between Jews and Gentiles to reconcile both unto God. For those He has chosen will surely be saved. "*A seed shall serve Him, and each generation in time to come shall hear of His salvation; the unborn, too, will hear the proclamation of what He wrought.*"

Jonah was a forerunner of this salvation. He was sent to preach the wonderful works of God. Jonah was sent to Nineveh to preach God's judgment, for God's judgment is glorified in saving sinners. Therefore the Gentiles will be brought by virtue of God's judgment in Christ.

Just listen: "The Moor, the Philistine and the Tyrian will enter the city of God and bear the name of Zion's children."

The conversion of Nineveh is only a little cloud like a man's hand, for it proclaims an abundant rain of spiritual awakening. God will bring many more Gentiles from all quarters of the earth. Then the Jewish covenant-people will be provoked to jealousy to recognize the glory of Zion's anointed King in the way of true conversion. For God has glorified His Son among His people, *but will glorify Him again*. One day the best missionaries will come forth from

the Jews. Jonah is an early forerunner of Christ's footsteps among the heathen.

The prophet Jonah is placed among the 'minor prophets' of the Old Testament and is mostly labelled as the 'disobedient prophet'. And in a sense this is true. But the reason why he did not want to go to Nineveh has a deeper cause. Jonah's disobedience cannot be approved of, it is true. But when we know experimentally what Jonah did, we will not condemn him, but rather ourselves. Some of God's children and servants know Jonah's ship rather well, for it is always in the harbour ready to sail away from the presence of the LORD. Going away from God is not so difficult, but grace is needed to be brought back in the right path. That is what Jonah also found out. And so do all God's children. Then I hear an erring people sing: "*He, the LORD, is good and upright in His dealings evermore. Sinners are by Him instructed, in the way untrod before. He will ever guide the meek, in His judgments true and holy. Teach His ways to those who seek with a contrite heart and holy.*"

God's way is a way which is glorified in the Way, Which is Christ. Many people find comfort in their own way. But when Christ is revealed, we must get rid of our way. And this always happens in the way of judgment and true conversion. "*Zion shall be redeemed with judgment and her converts with righteousness*", Is. 1:27.

When God is going to bend the bow of His holy judgment in Jonah's life, Jonah will be guided in His judgments true and holy. Then he goes overboard, for God spares no flesh. In the way of true conversion **you** must go overboard, I must go overboard. For in this way nothing is left but a ungodly man who can only admit: "*Thy judgment is just, Thy mercy I trust.*"

This is not a condition, but because of the ministration of death of the law, so that a death sinner comes to the end of the law (Rom. 10:4), Which is Christ, Who has trodden the winepress alone. Christ justifies the ungodly and that must be learned experimentally by faith to get free, sovereign grace. We see this also in the life of Jonah, who was already justified, but in the glorification of God's sovereign grace.

In dependence on the Lord and His Spirit, we will think about the four chapters of the book of Jonah separately. We shall consider them under four distinct headings:

1. **Jonah's flight**
2. **Jonah's prayer**
3. **Jonah's preaching**
4. **Jonah's gourd**

"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", Jona 1-2.

When a country keeps opposing the preaching of free grace and keeps ignoring the warning against sin, God will remove the candlestick of His Word to other nations and places. This is apparent from the story of Jonah whom the LORD calls away from his ministry among the people of Israel. For that people received the children's bread, but they sniffed at it. Then the Ninevites shall eat the crumbs, like the dogs eat the crumbs which fall from their masters' tables. The preaching of law and Gospel is like a rain-shower which slowly blows from one place to another.

When the plain truth of the Word of God is preached and people refuse to repent, God will remove the light of the candlestick. The LORD does not adapt His doings to man's doings, for everything takes place according to His purpose. When law and Gospel are preached to you, you cannot remain the same. This preaching declares every man guilty of the commandments and the blood of Christ. Nobody has a right to be unconverted, certainly not under the preaching of the holy Gospel. God created all of us perfectly in true knowledge, righteousness and holiness. In the state of innocence -in Paradise- we were the bearers of God's image. We have sinned ourselves out of that image because of our deep Adam fall.

We have fallen, indeed we are incapable of doing any good and inclined to all wickedness. But God is a God Who cannot renounce His judgment. And therefore He will eventually require each son of man to give back His image. Christ was required to give it back for His people. *"Who being the brightness of His glory, and the express image of His Person, and upholding all things by the Word of His power", Hebr. 1:3.*

Jonah preached this salvation among the Jews, but unfortunately without any effect. The people of Israel went on practising idolatry and the orthodox Jew thought to be saved by keeping the law. Idolatry and legalistic religion turned the Jewish people away from the God of their fathers Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Do we know this by experience? For idolatry and legal zeal are also to be found in your and my heart. We have no right to point at the Jews, for we ourselves are many times worse and this is a very personal experience. Then I am the chief and greatest of sinners. *"In evil we have gone astray,*

and sinful is our race. Rebellious our fathers walked, forgetful of Thy grace."

But the Jews knew no guilt and felt no sorrow. The LORD must complain about His own people: *"For My people have committed two evils, they have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters and hewed themselves out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water", Jer. 2:13.* God takes His servant Jonah away and sends him to another place, to the heathen, to the big city of Nineveh. And Jonah does not agree with this and does not obey the LORD by going the way He had ordered him to go. No, he flees from the presence of God. For it says: *"But Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the LORD", verse 3.*

Here Jonah is a picture of every man who has fled from the presence of the LORD by virtue of his deep fall in Adam. It is true, this story is not about Jonah's conversion, for he was taught and converted by God. But spiritual types and lessons both of Christ and the living Church are indeed bound up in it. Every biblical history is salvation-history and must be explained typological, because it refers to Jesus Christ and Him crucified. There are people who want to read the Old Testament purely as a history that is finished and they consider only the New Testament as the Gospel. This is the modern religion of our days. Apparently they can understand the New Testament without the Old Testament. But that is altogether impossible, for the Bible is God's infallible Word from Genesis 1 to Revelation 22. The Mediator of the covenant of grace cannot be understood and explained without the Old Testament. Paul does nothing else but he explains Christ with the help of the Old Testament.

But Paul didn't have a New Testament, writer!

But he had. Paul had the words of Christ in his heart and the testimony of God's Spirit by Whose inspiration he wrote the majority of books which constitute the New Testament. All the writers of the Bible knew at least two languages, the original language and the language of Canaan, which today's Bible-translators are also required to know. So Paul had a living communion with God, for he lived by faith in the Son of God, just like all the saints in the Bible did, both in the Old and the New Testament. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob also lived by the same faith. And through whom did David write the psalms but through the Spirit of Christ? What else should God's children live by but by the one Name under heaven given for salvation? For outside of Christ only death reigns. According to me a man like David had a deeper

understanding of the covenant-promises than many New Testament believers. We are living in a time in which churches are packed with people with a religion of doctrine and speculation. We are living in times in which Christians talk about religion from a mere letter knowledge. In church I meet many people who say: "I go to church every Sunday to hear the Word of God."

Well, that is no more than your duty, for to be saved we are required to use the means of grace.

But now a question: "Have you ever experienced, like Jonah, that the Word of the Lord came to you?"

What do you mean by this, writer?

I want to say that by nature a man thinks himself able to work with the Word of God, whereas in the life of true conversion, but also in the progressive life of faith, it is the Word that works with us through the efficacious work of the Holy Spirit. God is always the First, in the way of true conversion, but also in the life of faith. We also see this in Jonah's life. We read: "*Now the Word of the LORD came unto Jonah.*"

Did Jonah ask for this? Not at all. I do not read anything about it. Do we experience God speaking to us? God surely speaks to each one who lives for Him. But when the Word of the LORD comes to Jonah, he gets ready to flee. Indeed, this is man.

But Jonah was disobedient, wasn't he?

Yes, he indeed was. But tell me, readers, are you walking in the right path? And when was the Word of the Lord spoken to your soul?

Yes, but we are decent people and God speaks every Sunday, for when we are in church we hear the Word of the Lord, don't we?

But have you never been made to realize that you are fleeing from the presence of the Lord?

I am always in harness and I am only too eager to go to church!

Poor soul, then you do not know that for all your 'pious' church-attendance you are still fleeing from the presence of the Lord, because natural man seeks his ground in the outward hearing of God's Word. But when God by means of the preaching of the Word comes with the message of the cross, we go out of our way to flee from God. Or have you never experienced this? Nowadays most people are able to

stay in the right path. I meet very few people who have lost God through their own fault. But God's work in the soul is always two-sided: the law condemns, the Gospel pardons. On the other hand, when God in Christ speaks of peace in my heart, I may sometimes sing:

*"For this I know, that God is at my side.
In Him Whose Word I praise, I do confide;
He heard my voice when in my fears I cried.
The Lord is my Defender.
In God I trust, to Him my praise I render.
I do not fear, I trust His mercies tender.
My foes shall flee when He appears in splendour.
Why fear then human pride?"*

So Jonah had clearly heard that God had spoken to him, but he fled away. Why? Anyway that was a sign he had heard God's Word personally. He had not only heard it, but it had landed powerfully in his heart.

But does a man flee from God when the Word of God comes to him?

Now you hit the mark. Of course, this must be understood spiritually. By nature a man does not *take* to flight, but he *is* on the run from God's presence. The Word of the LORD already came to us in Paradise. "*In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die*", Gen. 2:17. And we did eat and we did flee from the presence of the LORD.

Do you see that by nature we want to work with the Word of God without realizing that our hearts are locked and sealed with seven seals?

In Paradise we ignored the Word of God. We have become disobedient. We have fallen into a state of total death. Even though the average church-goer does not at all believe this, yet it is reality.

Beloved fellow-traveller, where do you come from and where are you fleeing to?

"And went down to Joppa, and he found a ship going to Tarshish", verse 3.

Do you know what God's children discover? That Jonah's ship is always there! Fleeing from God is plain sailing. No problem at all. The car is already there and the driver is waiting for you when you want to go and choose your own way. Jonah's ship is always ready, the sailors are already on deck, the sails have already been hoisted, the ship will soon be unmoored and the captain is already on the bridge. Jonah didn't need to look for a ship at all. It was, as it were,

already waiting for him. But when God wants you to be somewhere, you will get there, even if you have to go right through hell. You may think you are fleeing from God, but you will have to go all the way back. That is grace. Not so with Pharaoh and his army. He was stopped, but perished with his army in the Red Sea because of God's displeasure.

Apparently this also awaited Jonah, for verse four says: *"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."*

When God's people disobey and choose to err from the way, they must count on a storm. Likewise in the way of initial conversion. Then you do not think at all: "God will throw me overboard and will save me like a Jonah." No, Zion shall be redeemed with justice. That is a way which does not seem right to anybody, for the end of this way is death. In Adam we have all fled in disobedience from the presence of God. And when God converts a man, he is made to discover that he lives under God's displeasure and in the storm of the wrath of God at sin. A natural man does not know anything about this. Jonah was sleeping at the bottom of the ship, as Jesus did mediatorally. Jonah was not aware of the storm. He had to be shaken awake. The same is true in the way of conversion. Then the Lord shakes a person awake. By nature every man sleeps his sleep of death. In spite of the storm of the wrath of God at sin he lives on quietly. This pictures our state of total death and indeed becomes a never ending lesson in the life of grace. However, God's children do not live under the wrath of God anymore, for God shall not be wroth with His people, nor rebuke them. But the LORD may raise a storm in the lives of His people for their erring ways, as He did with Jonah. We also see this with Abraham when he goes to Egypt because of the famine in Canaan. But the LORD had not ordered him to go. The father of the faithful finds himself in a storm of fear and then he begins to lie. For he says to the Egyptians that Sarah is his sister because he is afraid for his life. In our days many people lean on Abraham's righteousness: "We are Abraham's seed and we are baptized; we have done confession of faith and attend the Lord's Supper." But it shows you are being deceived because Abraham was also dependent on free grace.

On the other hand, the Lord also leads His people into the storm to try their faith. Then the disciples cry out: *"Master, Master, we perish!"* God allows storms to enter His people's lives so they will lean on Him in their trials. And then they often sink beneath the waves because of their

little faith, as Peter did, in order to be purified. Why? To declare His praise. *"Thou hast holden me by my right hand. Thou shalt guide me with Thy counsel"*, Ps. 73:23-24.

You see, this people's faith is not the ground either. Otherwise Peter could have said that his faith had saved him. Fundamentally it was by faith, it is true. And when he cried to Jesus for help it was also by faith. But Peter did not cry out: "Faith, help me!", but: *"Lord, help me!"*

Do you know, people of God, what you discover when you are about to disappear in the waves? That God is the Faithful One Who shall not forsake the works of His own hands. Jonah had to discover this as well. When you flee from God with a clear conscience, God knows where to find you, be it right through the depth of the sea.

But for the exercising of faith it is at times useful to stray far away, for then you will eventually discover which rope holds you. That does cost flesh, but the LORD does not spare flesh, even of His servants. Just look at Jonah.

Hardly had the ship left the port of Joppa when a gale rose so that the ship threatened to break. Then the sailors were filled with fear. *"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"*, verse 5.

When the world gets into distress people call out to their idols, such as the insurance idol, the medical idol... For what the doctor says is true, even if it never comes true! But ultimately everything must go overboard.

In the way of true conversion everything goes overboard: the barrels of religion, the barrels of self-righteousness, the barrels of self-love, the barrels of good intentions and the vessels of self-pity. All the barrels go overboard. In the life of grace this is a continuous process, for a lot lies at the bottom of the ship. I mean, the ship cannot be emptied just like that.

Do you know what lies at the bottom of the ship in the lives of God's people? There Jonah is asleep. This is something God's children know about. They have at times met Jonah there and it is no easy matter to awake him. God has to step in.

Come on, writer, I am not Jonah!

Have you never yet been aboard such a ship that was tossed to and fro by the storm and this through your own fault? Or have you always managed to keep your feet dry?

If so, you still belong to the sailors who are ashore. Fresh-water sailors do not understand anything about it either. Nor do they know what a storm on the high sea is.

They have always been able to keep their trousers dry. Well, then you are not doing too badly. Then you may relate a story which astounds and impresses people. You talk like an experienced helmsman who has not gotten any further than the beach. "It was such a strong wind that I lost my cap and the sand blew into my eyes so that I could not see anything."

And you came home having escaped by the skin of your teeth. Yes, yes, how people will admire you. Fake religion will revel in your stories and will swarm around you. But you have never been *in* the ship, you have never been *at sea* in a raging storm. No, never. Jonah had, but he was sleeping! He was asleep at the bottom of the ship which threatened to break in the midst of a raging storm and you were wide awake on the beach, where there was no danger to fear. Do you see the difference now?

How could Jonah possibly sleep so quietly in such a terrible storm? Jonah really was not lying there like the psalmist says: "*When I laid down I slept; I woke, for I was kept in His divine protection.*"

The LORD was faithful, it is true, but by nature a man, also Jonah, must be made conscious of the danger, even after grace is received. We must be awakened by God. That is the spiritual lesson in this story. Jonah slept because he did not put true faith into practice. When faith is not exercised God's people sleep quietly on and the heart is hardened, just like Jonah's. For Jonah the storm was not as bad, as it was for the unconverted sailors. For in spite of his erring from God's way, God had not forsaken him. If Jonah had been on the ship as an unconverted man with a clear conscience, he might not have slept so quietly. Then he might have begun to cry out. But now things were different. Jonah did not fear for his life, for he knew his life was hidden with Christ in God.

Many contend Jonah had learnt only a little of God. I will tell you something: Jonah was quite an experienced man in grace. He was one of the LORD's prophets who was very experienced in faith.

There are ministers who belittle Jonah because of his disobedient behaviour, but these have neither self-knowledge nor knowledge of God. For why had Jonah run away from the commission God had given him? Love made him do so.

You can try to convince me, but I don't believe any of it, writer!

I knew that, but it was really Jonah's love. For Jonah was

a thorough Jew, if I may say so. Jonah was a prophet of the Jewish nation. He loved the Jewish people, he felt one with them, as did all the LORD's prophets. Jonah was afraid that the Ninevites would repent before the Jewish people. He did not want the Ninevites to be granted this favour, but he wanted grace to be granted to his own people. Jonah knew that one day the Assyrians would take his people captives to heathen Babylon as a punishment for their idolatry. You know that Nineveh was the capital of Assyria. The Ninevites would presently take part in the captivity of the Jewish people. God had decided that and Jonah already saw this happening. And now preach judgment to those heathen so that they would repent? Jonah did not agree with this. Therefore he fled from the presence of God because he knew that God loves to forgive. This is the background to his flight. It was wrong, it is true, but this puts a different face upon the matter, doesn't it? For what other reason could Jonah have had to flee away from God? He loved the LORD. He was a man who feared the LORD, but he lived closer to the people of God than he did to the God of that people. He was wrong in doing this, for we must never love God's people more than God Himself, for then we make an idol of them and the LORD does not accept this, for God is jealous of His honour.

We also see this today. When people only meet to exchange great stories about what they have experienced, man is the focal point and the Lord Jesus is not in the centre. Then a storm arises, for when you are always talking about your experiences, you will come into collision with death. In the long run it will smell like rotting meat.

Hello writer, this is no way to talk!

Oh, you like to glorify the flesh, but when God is going to mean Himself, you have nothing left but firewood for hell. For God only saves hell-deserving sinners. But when you have truly been God-taught, you will say: "God's Word is not true because I believe it, or because I have experienced something of it, but because God has said so."

Then you will declare the great works of God and the story of your conversion does not take long, for the more you may know Christ, the shorter your conversion story becomes. Now I am not saying that when you brim over with it, you must not relate something about your conversion. But I meet people who can always tell about what they have experienced, but little or nothing about Christ. You see, than man is in the centre! And initially God's people have nothing but their own salvation in view.

However, not salvation, but God's Name and honour are important. When that becomes true, man wants to declare God's praise. They become insignificant people with a great God. Then it becomes Pentecost! Many pretend to be 'little ones', but they have a little God. These people are always talking about themselves. A little child is always concerned with its own name. The same is true of people who in their own esteem are converted. They are always talking about themselves. But God enables His people to declare His praise: "*He shall be my exultation, and my song at eventide. On His praise e'en in the night I will ponder with delight.*" And if it is not like that, you may forget the rest as far as I am concerned.

Now it is also true that we are living in a time in which people think they need no true experience. They live on a mere letter knowledge and mistake historical faith for saving faith. When you ask them if they know about the forgiveness of their sins you hear no response. Do you know what these people say? "I had rather remain true to God's Word." They are people who can live with the letter. But the letter is not the point, for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. It is true experience that matters, namely Easter and Pentecost!

Reconciliation and sealing. Pentecost only takes place on the ground of reconciliation. Pentecost always follows Easter and Ascension! This order will never change.

But nowadays there is hardly anybody who does testify of the King. I am not saying this to speak poorly of God, for the church is doing well because God goes on. He blesses man and beast. And there are still souls who in some measure know about this. These souls will also recognise each other in the power of His resurrection.

After all I see in our days a cloud like a man's hand which announces an abundant rain. I do not say so, but the Word of God says it, and it has been confirmed in my heart. Once more the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord.

Jonah did not see this testimony among his people. The orthodox Jews may have croaked about their conversion like Egyptian frogs, but Jonah saw no love or genuine testimony as a fruit of true conversion among them. That was Jonah's pain. And then to go to the wicked Ninevites? No, he simply could not. He could if he only knew for sure that when he preached judgment Nineveh would be destroyed. But he knew God was merciful and gracious enough to convert the heathen. And he could not bear the thought of that. He would rather have all the Ninevites

perish. Do you see that there is always something terrible in self-love? Jonah wanted to risk all the heathen. But God has no pleasure in the death of a sinner, but that he repents and should live for ever.

But Jonah did not want to go to Nineveh for another reason: he had not seen his preaching bearing any fruit among the Jews. It is a sad matter when a preacher feels that he only preaches judgment. This is painful, but God is free in His actions. Then Philip is called from Samaria, from that big flourishing congregation, and that hurts even more. He has to travel a desolate road leading to Gaza to teach an Ethiopian in the ways of the LORD.

God gathers His Church. His servants do not. But it is indeed painful, also for Jonah, to leave one's people and to have to go to Nineveh, that wicked heathen city, to preach the Word of God there. Be assured that it was a mortification for the flesh. So Jonah had to go to Nineveh. But he had no urge at all to do missionary work. He just did not want to go.

Nowadays there are many people who have a craving for missionary work. But in most cases they easily permit their fellow-villagers and fellow-countrymen to perish. If your neighbours do not know you fear the Lord, what is there for you to do on the mission-field?

The apostles first began to preach the Gospel of Christ in Jerusalem, next in Samaria and then to the ends of the earth. This order has not yet changed. If one is called to missionary work, God's order is first to preach the Gospel in the established church, through the spoken or written word. Paul serves as an example. He always wanted to preach the Gospel to the Jews first. Not until they rejected Christ, did he turn to the Gentiles. The same is true of Jonah. Only he wanted to stay in Jerusalem, for he loved his people with all his heart. And he also knew that God was a merciful God Who could also convert the Ninevites, though they were the enemies of the Jewish people. Jonah could not bear this. He could not accept it, so he fled from the presence of the LORD. And just before falling asleep at the bottom of the ship he actually said, as Elijah said under the juniper-tree: "*It is enough now, o LORD, take away my life, for I am not better than my fathers*", 1 King 19:4.

So Jonah was lying at the bottom of that ship and was fast asleep while the storm raged, threatening to break the ship. But God was faithful. God never forsakes His people, even when they stray. But Jonah was so hardened that he had become insensitive to everything. And in this situation the master of the ship came to awaken him.

When God's people stray far off, God can use the world to bring them back again. This happened with Jonah. A pagan captain had to call a prophet of the LORD to order. All things must work together for good in the lives of God's people. Also in Jonah's life, for the LORD had not forgotten him. But Jonah had to be convinced of his deliberate straying, otherwise God's children sleep on. In Jonah's life God used this pagan captain to awake him. The captain called Jonah to order because of the great danger the ship and its crew were in.

"What meanest thou, o sleeper?" verse 6.

If the captain had met Jonah on land he would not have addressed him as coarsely as he did now, but it was from sheer necessity. Necessity knows no law. This is also true in a spiritual sense. When in true conversion to God a soul is brought into a state of total ruin, he will cry unto God, casting himself unconditionally on His mercy. *"I would make supplication to my Judge"*, Job says.

Through the discovering operation of the Holy Ghost man is not only brought to realize that he is guilty before the law, but also that he has sinned against a gracious God. This is a subject, friends, about which you should not think lightly. For when you are going to cry unto God, you must know you are totally undone and then necessity knows no law. Then you stop praying to prevail upon God because you discover that God never renounces His justice. Then you have lost all your rights and there is no way out. You may have worked yourself up, but when God's majesty and holiness are being impressed upon your heart, you fall prostrate on the earth in total ruin and you cry out unto God, as the sailors on the ship did. But that is of no avail. The storm gets worse and worse. You become more and more miserable. Jonah made many souls pray! The whole crew cried out unto God. But it was in vain. Many people think that praying will deliver them from punishment. But here this kind of praying had no effect.

Just cry out to God in all your misery. To speak with all reverence, God is waiting till you give up. God does not deliver you because of your crying. He first has dealings with the sinner. We see this in the story of the blind man in Mark 10 verse 51. He even cried after the Lord Jesus. A man does not cry out to the Lord unless he has come to an end. But first Christ asks him: *"What wilt thou that I should do unto thee?"*

Look, something else besides prayer must become manifest, namely *faith!*

After the man has shown his faith the Lord Jesus tells

him: *"Go thy way, thy faith hath made thee whole."*

The Lord Jesus does not say: "Go thy way, your crying hath made thee whole." No, only faith can please God. We may cry having no faith, but we cannot believe without crying. Something precedes faith, namely crying. Then we are in great distress. The sailors were very fearful when they realized their crying was of no avail. Apparently something else was needed. The question of guilt has to be solved. But man keeps on working to solve the problem himself. Witness these sailors. They first approach a child of God to ask if he can avert judgment. In their distress many people go to a child of God to ask if he or she believes that things will end for the best. That is another kind of religion. But in the case of the captain things are something different. When things were at their blackest the captain had no time left to ask questions, but he orders: *"Arise, call upon thy God, if so be that God will think upon us, that we perish not"*, verse 6b.

The captain did not first have a quiet talk with Jonah. No, he cried out: *"Call upon thy God..."!*

This is not a condition, but a fruit of true discovery. The same is true when we are in bodily need. When somebody is lying in the water he starts crying for help. Not to be converted, but to be rescued. Just look at the sailors in this story.

There is something else bound up in this. When a worldly person is in agony of death the innate knowledge of God becomes manifest. Then such a person begins to believe that God is there and that only He can save. Then he starts crying to an unknown God. I sometimes think that our country will get into such difficulties that the living Church, like Jonah, must be awakened by the world, for the living Church sleeps and is guilty of the need of nation and people. Jonah was an office-bearer, called by the LORD God, but he will presently be thrown overboard! This office-bearer was made to admit he was the guilty one. God's honour was at stake. When the living Church remains by the doctrine of Christ by true faith, she is cast out, like Jesus. But we cannot take our own way, for guilt cannot be evaded. However, when we are true witnesses of Christ the Lord Jesus says to us in Matthew 10:14: *"And whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear your words, when ye depart out of that house or city, shake off the dust of your feet."*

"Let us go forth therefore unto Him outside the camp, bearing His reproach. For here we have no continuing city, but we seek one to come", Hebr. 13:13-14.

Then the sailors cast lots to find out who is the guilty one. This is strange, isn't it? Casting lots was not unusual in those days. We read that when another apostle had to be chosen to take the place of Judas, the apostles cast lots while calling on the Name of the Lord. This example is a clear proof of a church with a theocratic principle.

In the Middle Ages the lot was also cast between two persons who were suspected of a crime to find out who was guilty. This was called 'God's execution of judgment'.

I think it is more biblical to administer judgment in this way to see who is guilty, although one should be careful not to idolize the casting of lots.

"So they cast lots and the lot fell upon Jonah", verse 7b.

Listen, Jonah, you surely could have told them this, couldn't you?

Yes, but Jonah had already done so in verse three, which says he had already told the sailors why he wanted to sail with them, namely to flee from the presence of the LORD. But the sailors knew nothing about judgment and mercy. They did not know that God could visit His people in this way.

Well, this teaches us something! Do we believe that every trial in our lives is allotted to us by God? Do we see God's providence and God's hand in it? Yes, our mouths gladly admit this, but that does not mean anything to the Lord. It must become a matter of the heart, for otherwise man lives as a victim and not as a guilty sinner.

In this respect I sometimes hear people say: "People have not done this to me." But this way of speaking implies shifting the blame to God.

Well, friends, we must get rid of a lot of things in our lives. We must get rid of ourselves as well as of our orthodoxy. We cannot appear before God with a bookcase full of old writers. I believe we are living in a time in which there are many people who live on 'bookcase-mercy'. I heard about a man who had always been instructive to God's people who heard him gladly. But on his death-bed he pointed at his bookcase and cried out: "There is my mercy, and now I shall perish for ever." It is a terrible thing to fall into the hands of the living God in such a way. God's people are continually plagued by the thought that what God has done in their lives is nothing but imagination. That is distressing, friends, when the devil keeps on suggesting you have only imitated people's experiences from books. If God never more confirmed His own work, you would perish. However, the upright man goes **unconditionally** with all

his impossibilities to God, like queen Esther unconditionally went to the king. *"And so will I go in unto the king, which is not according to the law; and if I perish, I perish"*, Esther 4:16.

And when through a way of distress God confirms His own work again everything is true again and God proves to be true. This was also the case when you could not believe it. Therefore the righteous shall live by faith. But in this way the true people of God worry a lot. *"And the promises He made us? Will the LORD forget to aid us?"*

That is a way in which we die to ourselves. The 'Hallelujah-religion' and the Pharisee of our days do not know anything about this. They have a mere take-it-for-granted religion, a religion which consists of talking, doing and believing.

But among the righteous there is favour. For then Jonah, a man who knows true discovering grace, explains everything to the sailors and tells them Who God is. He does not have much to hide any more.

We also see this with the Samaritan woman when the Lord Jesus tells her who and what she really is. Then she goes and tells who she herself is and Who Christ is. *"Come, see a Man, Who told me all things, that ever I did; is not This the Christ?" John. 4:29.*

But something preceded these words. For in the East it was customary for women to go to the well in groups for safety's sake. The wells were mostly outside the town where beasts of prey and murderers had free play. The Samaritan woman came alone because she had been cast out of society on account of her immoral life. As an accursed sinner she had come to Jacob's well all by her self, with death at her heels and a cry in her heart to the God of Jacob. That is what the Holy Ghost also does in the way of conversion. For by nature we do not know Who God is. If we did we could not live on so quietly. But when the Holy Ghost reveals this to man, his rest is disturbed. Neither rest nor peace can be found because of my sins. Then you realize who God is and who you are yourself. Then you fear death, for dying means meeting God. Maybe you were once the hero of the village, but when the Holy Ghost enables you to see who you really are, you will fear a rustling leaf. Then you will one day cry out: "Woe is me, for my many sins." Then you will stand in awe of the presence of God's majesty which will be impressed upon your heart and each lightning bolt will be for you. When this was my state, this was true. Whenever there was a thunderstorm I was full of fearing thoughts: "The next clap of thunder is my last, and justly so, and that for ever. Woe is me, for my many sins."

Then you will fear God's majesty, as the sailors did, for Jonah had preached the formidable majesty of God to them.

"Then were the men exceedingly afraid, and said unto him, Why hast thou done this?" verse 10.

If God's majesty and the holiness of His Being are impressed on your heart, you will cry out: *"What shall I do to escape well-deserved punishment?"* That was the effect of Peter's preaching on the day of Pentecost. That is also true in nature, for the sailors said to Jonah: *"What shall we do unto thee, that the sea may be calm unto us?"* In fact they said: "What must we do to stay alive?" "What shall we do unto thee?"

The sailors still wanted to do something. But that does not help. In order to be saved we must do nothing and rest on Christ's righteousness. All religions outside of true faith in Christ are based on self-deliverance. And this also holds true for a so-called reformed man who satisfies himself with a little praying and pleading. But here Jonah denies himself, for he does not say: 'Then you must be thrown overboard.' No, he says: *"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,"* verse 12. In fact he says: "Throw me overboard, for it is my fault."

If a man really becomes guilty before God he has nothing to lose any more. Then he will justify God and say that He is righteous in all He does. Then God cannot harm you.

May I ask you, readers: "Is this language beyond you?"

Do not think it is too high, for you learn this in the depths. By nature we are so proud that we do not believe we have fallen into the depth, for otherwise we would understand this language experimentally. Then we would say "Amen." A man does everything to stay out of God's hands. I can understand this. But when God carries on His discovering work more and more we have to learn that nothing is left of us but a naked and hell-deserving sinner.

However, Jonah does not jump overboard himself. God's children do not jump into hell themselves, but they do become hell-worthy. In the way of conversion God brings a person to surrender unconditionally. Then you must, like Jonah, go on your last trip. Then you bid farewell to your wife and children and say: "Farewell, dear wife, farewell, dear children, there goes father, there goes this monster, to tell God just once more what monster he is and then it is lost for ever."

If you said that in church people would say: "You should not take it too seriously. Come on, have a drink and take a walk in the sunshine. That will make you feel better. Light a

cigar and just go for a walk in the woods. Then you will feel better again."

These people want to make you feel better, but God wants His people to lose everything and only lean on Him. That is precisely the opposite. "We shall pray for you", these people will say. Oh certainly, a man will go to great lengths to stay out of God's hands.

And they rowed and rowed to bring the ship back to land, but they could not, it was of no use. *"For the sea wrought and was tempestuous against them,"* verse 3. The harder they rowed, the more violent the storm became.

But surely it doesn't have to go that deeply?

Well, the sailors did not think this necessary either, but such was the situation and they could not change it.

But I am not one of the sailors!

I know. I knew you were a sand-captain on the beach and that you are pretty well able to manage. Then you will say to those who worry and wrestle in the storm: "Just keep your rudder straight, lower the sails and cast anchor." That is the message of the average theologian. Many have turned the Gospel into a new law. But God's children have no hands with which to cast anchor, for the Anchor is Christ, Who entered into the inner sanctuary to gather in His people.

"Nevertheless the men rowed to bring it to the land, but they could not," verse 13. It does not say: "They did not want to." No, "They **could** not!"

That is from the Lord, for if you manage to get your ship out of a storm yourself, you have never experienced a real storm, for when the Lord reveals this to you, you cannot do anything about it yourself. The Lord makes you lose everything so that on your part it always becomes *impossible*. Then nothing you do can save you, neither your prayers, nor your faith. God does not do difficult things, but impossible things. There are many people who experience a lot of difficulties. But then I will say: "Oh, it is not that bad, you are still able to breathe." But our text says: "But they **could** not."

In this way God's people only have impossibilities. It is no longer possible, they are past saving, they are undone.

"Then they cried out to the Lord," verse 14. Have you ever cried out to the Lord, reader?

Yes, I have. I cry out to God every day.

So you are in a storm every day. Don't be silly, friend. The text does not say: "And they spoke to the Lord." No,

they called, they cried out!

"I will, if thou ask, fill thine every need." No, it does not say that. It says: "*I will, if thou plead, fill thine every need, all thy wants relieving.*"

Young reader, then one day you will call to God from a dry ditch, or from behind a tree, so that the cows stop grazing. Then all those cows will stand around you as silent witnesses. If those cows and trees could speak and tell what God teaches His people in the dust of the earth, there would not be so much religion in our days. Don't you think so? I think, if I may express it this way, that the cows in former times knew more about conversion than many present-day church-goers. For our misery is that we have no right understanding of our misery and that we are blind to Christ's work. When a man is brought to this point, he will call and pray while crying!

*"They were distressed and humbled,
Their souls did melt away;
Like drunken men they stumbled
In terror and dismay.
The Lord saw their despair,
And when to Him they shouted,
He heard their fervent prayer;
The raging storm He routed."*

How can I explain this further? I shall try to make it clear to you with an example from nature.

Imagine you and I are walking in a mountainous country and I make you aware of the danger of a ravine. Of course you nod and say that you heartily agree with me. But then I take your arm and take you with me to the edge of the ravine. I feel you resisting. Why? Because talking about a ravine is quite different from standing face to face with it. So we are standing on the edge of a ravine. I am the mountain-guide and tell you that it is very dangerous to walk along the edge of such a ravine. Now I see you nodding even harder. But not a word passes your lips. You become silent. Why? The danger becomes more imminent. I take your hand again and pull you even closer to the edge. But then you get frightened and shout: "No!" I calm you down and say there is no danger. But you dare not because your senses warn you of the impending danger. You also realized this a while ago, but now that you have come closer, you believe and feel it. Then we walk further down the mountain-track which runs close beside the ravine because of the precipice rising next to the ravine. Suddenly you slide

on a loose stone so that one of your legs slips into the ravine. Now you cry out: "Help!"

I immediately grab hold of you and pull you out of your danger. Now you know by experience what it means to slip into a ravine. And therefore you cried out: "Help!" For a moment you were in peril of life.

"Then they cried unto the LORD and said: O LORD, deliver Thou my soul", the sailors said.

Then there is need, untenable need. And they begin to cry, like you cried 'help' when you slipped on the mountain-track and thought you would fall into the ravine.

But how does this become true in my life? For you say it happens in this way. But in our church we are taught differently. We must accept.

I shall give you another example. On a laboratory-ship engaged in deep-sea research using deep-sea divers, two divers once had to find out what colour a certain kind of deep-sea fish was. The first diver went down to the bottom of the sea, re-surfaced and reported: "The fish is white." The second diver went down, re-surfaced and reported: "The fish is red." The man who was in charge of the research had been taught that theoretically the fish was supposed to be black. So the reports of the two divers had confused him. What colour was the fish really? One said white, the other said red. He himself had read in books it was black. What should he do now? Discussion with the two divers only added to the confusion. At last there was nothing left for the research leader but to go overboard himself to find out with his own eyes what colour the fish was. So there he went. After some time he re-emerged and shouted: "The fish is white and red!"

Beloved reader, Christ is white and ruddy, *the chiefest among ten thousand*. He is white because of His perfect holiness and ruddy because of His all-cleansing blood-righteousness. If we want to know what Christ looks like we must be cast into the deep, for there Christ finds the ungodly for whom He died in due time to justify, to cleanse and sanctify them. Then Christ is given to you. For the Gift precedes acceptance of faith. *"For our King has been given by the God of Israel."* This is no high language, for Jonah went into the deep to learn this as we shall presently see. To speak with all reverence, Christ does not remain standing on the edge of the pit of your misery, for He descended into your hell, people of God.

But the sailors were still in great need and need leads to prayer. That is a miracle, for need can also make a man

curse.

"O LORD, let us not perish for this man's soul...", verse 14.

Apparently they had stopped crying to their idols. And now they cried unto the God of Jonah because they were in agony of death.

Jonah was already ready to be thrown overboard, but the sailors were not yet ready for it. What does this mean?

Here the sailors typify those people who think to be saved by the covenant of works. They always want to save anything they can by works. They keep on rowing. They just keep on trying to make peace with churches with unsound doctrine. But remember, when God begins to work we cannot go together when we are not standing on the same biblical foundation. As an example I mention the two men who went together to Emmaus, facing darkness. And now the miracle: *"Christ went with them"*, it says. Christ preceded His people into judgment to teach them He buried judgment. First He dealt with the disciples on their way to Emmaus. But it must go one step further. A settlement has to be reached in our lives and that is what these two people also experienced, for not much later Jesus revealed Himself in the breaking of the bread. The vital point is, do we know the Person of Christ.

There are many people who through their own fault keep on working in a broken covenant of works. But there are also those who, through free grace, have been brought to realize working and talking are of no avail. They become dead to the law and do not trust on their feelings, for it becomes impossible, it becomes untenable! Then you have come to the end of your rowing. Then the situation becomes so distressful that something must happen and indeed something does happen.

"Then they took up Jonah and cast him forth into the sea, and the sea ceased from her raging", verse 15.

This refers to the true covenant-people. These souls throw their self-righteousness away like filthy rags. But to be such a filthy rag! There you go then, overboard, into the depths of the sea. And Jonah was already prepared for this.

There is a people on earth who are made to comply with God's dealings. That is God's necessary work. For do you know what precedes justification of the ungodly? That the ungodly justifies God.

But, writer, why do you explain justification of the ungodly from Jonah's being cast into the sea?

Because a fish will not swim above the water, but in the water. And to be saved by a fish you need to go overboard.

Jonah's going overboard and his being swallowed by the fish typifies justification. For to be buried with Christ you need to be dead to the law, you must need go overboard with all your barrels of self-righteousness. Here the fish symbolizes Christ's intercession in extreme agony of death. This has nothing to do with spiritualising things. It needs no proof, for the Lord Himself says in Matthew 12 verses 39-40: *"An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign (proof), and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the fish's belly, so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth."*

Here Christ Himself indicates Jonah's stay in the fish as a type and image of His burial. The scribes and Pharisees wanted to see a sign of this. Then they would certainly believe in Him. A sign of His divinity. But to know Christ as God, we must join Jonah into the grave to know that Christ as God buried the grave and killed death. And, readers, the Pharisee also lives in your heart and mine, for by nature we want to be saved by a knowledge of doctrine and speculation. That is precisely what the 'work-covenanters' want, like all people by nature. But as Jonah's stay in the fish was hidden to the natural eye, likewise Christ's grave is also a mystery in a spiritual sense. For great is the mystery of godliness.

But the Lord Jesus tells us that the sign of salvation does not lie in speculation, but in true faith in Him. And true faith knows of having died with the Lord and having lain with Him in the grave, as did Jonah in the belly of the fish. Those people do not want to see a sign, because they have seen *Him* in His beauty, in His kindness and in His suitability. That is always the true mark. Talking about marks, this is the mark: (three) days and (three) nights under your bed, or in a dry ditch, like Jonah in the belly of the fish and like Jesus in the heart of the earth. But before Jonah found himself in the belly of the fish he had to be thrown overboard. Before Christ could be laid in the grave, He laid down His life. Before you are justified, you will justify God. There is no need to urge you, for it happens automatically or it does not happen at all. That is not action, but grace. Jonah had become willing to be thrown overboard, for he had not only pleaded guilty, but he was also willing to undergo punishment. He had pleasure in the punishment of his iniquity.

But Jonah, then you will perish, will not you?

Oh, beloved friends, Jonah would have said: "We will not

become lost, but we are already lost." Jonah had nothing more to lose. He had to go overboard. "Well", he thought, "nothing is lost by it, but on the contrary, these sailors win by it, for I am to blame. And though I must drown, nothing is lost by it, if only these people will be saved."

Jonah was not justified when he went overboard. He was already justified. But here it is a symbol of justification.

In the way of justification God makes His people submit *unconditionally!* Once a poet expressed this very sweetly:

*"When under holy judgment
the soul does not fight anymore,
but approves of the wages of sin,
whatever may befall her,
justifying her God
which be her eternal lot.
When in her last joy (honouring God's virtues),
the virtue of justice wins,
even though it requires: kill the child.
O, hour of judgment,
o, deadly hour.
Then God does not allow
the sinner to perish.
Here the Son is kissed
before she perishes from the way.
Here she is consciously
assured of her state.
Here she drinks the blood of the Lamb
which lets her live.
Here wrath is quenched
and it is: Peace with God,
through the sacrifice of His Son,
o, most blessed lot."*

Rijer Pothoven (1904-1976)

A man may be fascinated by the preaching of the Gospel, but the arrow of true conversion lies further. But fascination is not yet conversion. For when you have stayed onboard with your fascination, the question of sin has not yet been solved in your life. You are still able to row on. Do you understand? A solution must be reached in your life. You see, those rowers had to get rid of Jonah, but Jonah also had to get rid of them to be able to be saved by free grace only. Do you understand? If this takes place, the abovementioned poem becomes reality: "*Here God's wrath is quenched and it is: Peace with God...*"

I once more stress the point: Jonah did not become a

child of God in the belly of the fish, for he was already a child of God before he fled to Tarshish. But concerning the state of his life he had no 'peace with God', for he was the cause of the sailors almost perishing. God used this storm to get Jonah where He wanted him to be: "Just throw me overboard", Jonah said, "because it is my fault."

What makes Jonah confess his guilt so willingly? Because Christ willingly went overboard for Jonah. Jonah went overboard as one being guilty, but Christ died as One being guilty by imputation. He was made guilty so that Jonah could be swallowed by the fish which God provided.

And now to be personal. Just imagine you are on a ship. It has hardly left the harbour when a violent storm arises. Eventually the cargo and ballast must be thrown overboard and finally the crew must abandon ship as well. At best the life boats are lowered.

But suppose there are no life boats just as with Jonah?

Then, viewed spiritually, you come into the narrow part of the funnel and you enter the ravine through your own fault. Then you cry out: "Justly lost, it is my own fault, my own fault", and you are on the point of falling to your death. But the Lord does not leave His people there. This situation does not last three days. Jonah was not in the water for three days. No, it happened in the twinkling of an eye. Then the LORD provided a fish to swallow Jonah and he was in its belly for three days and three nights. How was that possible? Because Christ was in the grave of the earth for three days and three nights. Christ had paved the way for Jonah through the sea and this already from everlasting. If he had not, Jonah would have perished woefully. Christ died for Jonahs, so that while dying they would live in Him. For He has said: "*I live, ye shall live also*", John 14:19.

Jonah was kept alive in the belly of the fish, for Christ said: "*He that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live.*" He survived because Christ died for him. But when the Lord Jesus is lying in the grave, His disciples are in a small room with the door shut. There is a people on earth who knows of the sensitive fellowship with Jesus, but nevertheless lack the power of His resurrection. They still live by feeling and not entirely by faith. That is a people who have seen and tasted all their salvation in Christ, resting on the promises according to His Word. But you cannot look through the promised glasses. It is the fulfilment that matters, although the paradoxical character of true faith cannot be compared with the order of nature. True, the promise and its fulfilment can also coincide. But then we

speak of an active promise with a progressive fulfilment. If in a promise the future is mentioned, the fulfilment still has to take place. Then God gives you a promise, as with Abraham and Sara, that Isaac will be born. That is a passive promise which requires fulfilment. The Lord had promised Simeon that he would see the Child Jesus with his natural eyes. Then Simeon lived for some time by faith expecting the fulfilment of the promise which had not yet come true. Simeon got a passive promise from the Lord which required fulfilment.

But when Christ says to His disciples in Matthew 28:20: "*And lo, I will be with you always, even unto the end of the world*", He at the same time bequeaths His testament to His disciples, from which they drew comfort and strength all their lives, as long as they exercised faith.

When we know this by experience, we know Christ in the power of His resurrection. There the disciples received an active promise, that is to say: when the Lord spoke to them they simultaneously received the fulfilment of the promise which would be continually fulfilled. This was a promise which came into force immediately. Then the promise is not important in the first place, but the One Who promises. But in the initial life of grace Christ reveals Himself through the Scriptures. And He reveals Himself in the sacraments. We see this most clearly with the disciples on their way to Emmaus. In the life of grace the Lord also gives promises for this temporary life and they require fulfilment.

As we already said this also applies to the promise God had made to Abraham. Abraham had to wait quite a long time until it was fulfilled. Isaac was not born before Abraham and Sarah were as good as dead. When the LORD says: "*I will bring you into the bond of the covenant...*", it still has to happen, it is waiting for the fulfilment of what has been promised. But when the Lord says: "*I alone am thy salvation*", or "*I am thy shield, and thy exceedingly great reward*", then these are active promises with an immediate application. The same holds for the promise: "*I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands.*" Then we talk of an immediate application. Usually such an active promise attended by an immediate application is spiritually preceded by a way similar to the one Jonah naturally had to experience, that is to say, overboard with all your faith and experience in order only to live by Christ. To sum up we can say that in justifying His people the Lord usually gives *Himself* to them together with an active promise by application in which not words, but the matters themselves

are important. After grace received the Lord usually exercises His people with passive promises, so that they live by faith and appeal to God's promises on the ground of His everlasting immutability and faithfulness. But whether fulfilled or not, faith looks to God Who promised it.

In the way of conversion the Lord can also give passive promises, but then you are still onboard and your business has not yet been finished. It has been finished on God's part already from everlasting, but we cannot work with that. We cannot appear in the sight of God with a stolen text, can we? We must experientially become one plant with Christ. This happens when "the fish vomits you onto the dry land." Then you know the resurrected Prince of life. This is a kingdom that cannot be moved. When Jonah was in the fish he was in a kingdom that could be moved, for that fish moved Jonah. But on the part of God it was a kingdom that cannot be moved, for God moved that fish. And at God's command the fish vomited Jonah onto the dry land. Then Jonah was lying on the beach of God's kingdom that cannot be moved and then he knew it too.

We have distinguished some matters which, really, cannot be separated. True conversion is not a religion in which all kinds of stations have to be passed, as is often said nowadays. For if it is true it can be written on the edge of my nail: He took my sin and I received His righteousness. *Sweet, dear Lord Jesus!*

God's love is so great that a man can still be saved through faith in Christ.

I tell you one thing more. Many people can tell exactly how all this works. But when Jonah was thrown overboard he really did not know he would be saved. But God's honour was at stake. Only free grace could save Jonah.

God often afflicts His people so that they learn to rest only on God in Christ by faith. For, as I have already said, *faith* looks to Christ and not so much to the fulfilment of the promise. But for the *believer* the fulfilment is the thing that really matters. For if the fulfilment takes a long time and fails to come, God's people also experience a storm. But then it is a storm of the trial of faith and in the storm you can experience peace between God and your soul too, because faith looks to the Invisible One.

Jonah's faith was exercised in the belly of the fish. But Jonah did not rest on his faith, but on God.

I will try to explain this to you in the next chapter.

Beloved reader, have you already gone overboard with Jonah and have you been saved by Christ? Or do you still live for your own account?

2. JONAH'S PRAYER

"Then Jonah prayed to the LORD his God out of the fish's belly", verse 1.

The second chapter deals mainly with prayer. What is praying? Firstly, it is commanded and it concerns everybody, for a prayer-less life is a godless life. Secondly, prayer is the appointed means to pour out your heart before God. Praying is begging. In the life of grace prayer is the breath of the soul. Thirdly, true prayer is no work of merit, but a gift of grace. We do not want to separate the facts mentioned, but to distinguish them. Praying is an impossible duty. That is why the disciples said in Luke 11 verse 1: *"Lord, teach us to pray."* They could not pray.

I meet many people who say: "You should pray hard for it." This sounds very good, of course, but this is often said far too lightly as if a man can pray. True prayer is mingled with faith. True praying requires an answer. If we ask for conversion and meanwhile live merrily on, our praying is no more than cursing. The true praying person does not only pray out of duty, but he cannot help praying because his need is so great. A true prayer is waiting for an answer, not passively but actively. Praying is expecting.

*I wait for God to hide me,
My soul with longing stirred,
Shall hope, whatever betide me,
In His unfailing Word.
My soul waits for Jehovah
With more intensive desire,
Than watchers for the morning,
To dawn of day aspire."*

If our praying is no more than vain repetition, or purely duty, you will understand that this has nothing to do with true praying. There are people who always know what to pray, but the disciples did not know how to pray any more.

Are there still readers who do not know how and what to pray any more? I do not mean to glorify ignorance, but have there been times we got stuck with all our *praying*? If you call your praying *praying*, may I then ask you if you have ever received an answer to your prayer? If not,

beloved friends, you have never yet truly prayed.

*"We wait to hear what God will say. Peace to His people
He will speak, and to His saints, but let them seek, no more in
folly's path to stray."*

A man, especially a church-goer by nature, just prays to stay out of God's hands. By nature we pray only for ourselves. Then we have a whole list of desires, but no answer is forthcoming. What is the reason for this?

James 4 verse 3 says: *"Ye ask and receive not, because ye
ask amiss, that you may consume it upon your lusts."*

Do you know that a man actually does not want to have anything to do with praying? I do not say this, but the Word of God teaches it. For we could also say that praying is 'seeking after God'. Well, there you are, for there is nobody who seeks after God, says God's Word in Psalm 14 and Romans 3. Only the Holy Ghost can teach us to pray. No one else can.

Do you know, readers, where God teaches His people to pray? In the depth of affliction, the Lord trains His people in praying by testing their faith. In the early life of faith, much value is attached to a sensitive prayer. But faith in its full development is more concerned with the prayer of faith, be it only a sigh.

At first you considered your prayer only a true prayer when it was attended with some feeling. But when this feeling was gone, you thought God could not hear your prayer. But when the Lord leads you in ways of affliction He makes you experience that the worthiness or feeling of your prayer does not matter, but that you can genuinely pray if you lack these things completely. Then a sensitive prayer is not important, but only the prayer of faith.

I want to distinguish, but not to separate this, for faith and feeling go together. Feeling is a fruit of faith, not the other way around. Then the Lord does not make you dependent on your feelings, but on the ministry of the Holy Ghost. Then He makes you sit in the immovable Kingdom of the unadorned, immutable Word of the Triune God. That often goes through a deep valley of afflictions. God does not afflict His people to leave them there. No, He exercises their faith so that they only trust in Him whatever impossible circumstances they are in.

If God promises you something in answer to your prayer, you usually receive the fulfilment of that promise through a way in which the circumstances are utterly unlike the outcome of that promise. The Lord always works in a way which fills us with wonder. He makes His people die to all feeling as a ground of salvation. Then the importance lies

in the prayer of faith for the fulfilment of the promise.

I think Jonah knew something of this too. Or do we consider the story of Jonah in the belly of the fish a legend? By the way, do we really believe that Jonah was swallowed by that fish? Now we must not immediately say 'yes', for then it is to be feared we only live by mere letter knowledge, or speculation. Do you know when you begin to believe that Jonah was in the fish? When you have been in such a fish yourself. Then it becomes true: "*Thy way is in the sea, and Thy path in the great waters, and Thy footsteps are not known*", Ps. 77:20.

If you have understood it correctly, we do not mean Jonah's literal experience, but rather the spiritual. For if we know this experimentally, it is a fruit of the death of Christ.

In Matthew 12 verse 40 the Lord Jesus says: "*For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the fish's belly, so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.*"

There is a people on earth who will also understand this way because they also know about three days and three nights. Look at Paul who as a blind man was led into the street, called Straight, and who did not eat for three days and three nights, lying at God's feet as a blind man without any rights. This is a continuous process in the life of grace. For in John 12 verse 26 Christ says: "*If any man serve Me, let him follow Me, and where I am, there shall also My servant be.*" Christ did not go this way in imitation of Jonah, but as Substitute for Jonah. Otherwise Jonah would certainly have drowned in the eddies of the waves. This is also true of Paul and of the whole Church. Jonah had to go this way as a guilty man, but Christ went this way as Surety for His Church that is guilty of death. Christ said, as it were, to His Father: "Father, I have paid the debt Jonah has made with Thee. I take the guile of all that disobedience upon Myself." "*For he is a chosen vessel unto Me to bear My Name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel*", Acts 9:15.

That was true of Paul.

That was also true of Jonah and of all the missionaries called and sent by God. They go and preach the Name of Christ on the ground of His payment and as the result of His ministry. Christ made that payment for all His sheep, whether you believe it or not. Christ died for the ungodly in due time. God's people will surely be saved because of God's everlasting decree.

Child of the Lord, you may be entangled in your unbelief and desperation, but God's work is sure and certain.

Jonah was a man who firmly believed God. That is why he fled, as we already said in chapter one. Do you know what we need in our days? This: Preachers who flee from the presence of the Lord.

I think this is a mysterious way of talking, writer.

It looks like it, but I only want to say that nowadays they seem to be more willing than the prophet Jonah was. But when the preaching of the Gospel does not result in the people's conversion, then something is fundamentally wrong. Jonah did believe God would convert the Ninevites and that is why he fled. Do you know why we are living in such anxious times? The established Church does no longer expect God to do great things. Many people no longer believe that God still converts people and they think it normal that man remains unconverted under the preaching of the Gospel. But Jonah believed God still converted people. But what does the established Church have which provokes people to jealousy? Nothing because we do not believe the Lord still converts people. I do not wish to generalize because there is also a people who believe the Lord does do it. They do not believe it with their mouths, but because it is in the Word of God, the power of which they have experienced and believed.

In my village God saved four souls and brought them to spiritual liberty. When I recount this somewhere people look at me as if they want to say: "Surely this does not happen nowadays, does it?" Or they say: "Has Christ been revealed to them, or have their sins been forgiven?"

A religion like this tires me out so much that I sometimes feel inclined to turn to the Gentiles.

But Christ first had to be rejected by the elders and preachers. And that is still the same today. This applies to all the people of God. And this is all free, people of God.

I would like to return to the abovementioned error that a revealed Mediator would not yet be an applied Mediator. If this is being taught, it is an experience which has nothing to do with true experience of which the apostle speaks in Galatians 1 verses 15-16: "*But when it pleased God, Who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by His grace, to reveal His Son to me.*" This means forgiveness of sin and being delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. This is a revealed Christ in the application. I do know what people mean, it is the so-called experimental language. And I love experimental language, as long as it begins in Christ and ends in Christ, for He is the Alpha and the Omega. But I also

know why certain circles uphold this religion of 'seeing is not yet having'. To stay out of God's hands! They have invented such an experience so that one can be a child of God outside of Christ. And this you find both in liberal and orthodox circles. Therefore the Church does not radiate power. Christ is no longer glorified. But even now the Lord still has 'seven thousand', represented in the individual, as in Elijah's days, who know Him in truth and who declare His praise.

Do you know what is also so shameful for the Church too? That so many ministers are called without God knowing anything about it, because it is not done through faith. There are ministers who sometimes have five calls at a time and they do nothing but decline. According to me this is the spiritual poverty of our time. Most calls remind me of a common lottery.

Once there was an old elder in a certain vacant congregation who because of the urgent need for a minister called his fellow office-bearers together and said: "Brothers, let us all go to the vacant parsonage."

Having arrived there the old brother spoke again and said: "And now we will all kneel down on the bare floor of the parsonage to call upon God to receive a pastor and teacher out of His hand."

The brothers looked at each other, for they had not expected this, but they did feel the necessity of this request. One by one they knelt down on the floor of the vacant room in the parsonage. The old elder prayed and cried unto God. When he had spoken the 'amen' he said: "Brothers, God shall certainly hear us, for before long we shall receive a pastor and teacher out of His hand again." And it did happen, friends. This really was a prayer of faith. But you hardly hear about this nowadays. In many cases the work of calling has become no more than a dead formality. But with Jonah it was different, for Jonah also received a call. We would say: It said in the Joppa newspaper: "*Jonah in Canaan received a call to Nineveh.*" But when Jonah received the letter of calling from God, so to speak, he thought: "No, that is not in my line. Just imagine that the Lord will bestow grace on those Gentiles who forget God, no, I begrudge them this."

That is just about what Jonah would have thought. And the next day the Joppa newspaper already reported: "*Has declined the invitation to Nineveh: Jonah in Canaan.*"

But we read that Jonah did not stay in Canaan. He left, but he did not go to Nineveh. He wanted to flee to Tarshish. We know what follows. The prophet had embarked on a

ship in the harbour of Joppa to flee to Tarshish. But God sent out a great wind onto the sea. Jonah was found guilty of this and the sailors cast him overboard. Jonah disappeared in the raging waves. Jonah is gone! And suddenly there was the fish...

You may smile at this, but for Jonah it was reality. Do you think Jonah had expected the fish to swim alongside that ship? If Jonah had known beforehand that such a huge fish was waiting for him, I daresay he would have stayed on board for a while. But when he was thrown overboard he thought: "Now this is the end and justly so."

"No, Jonah, if this would have been the end of you, God would have lost His honour." For the LORD had a task for Jonah, didn't He? We read that in the first chapter. And God's decree will always be fulfilled! In this case God's command was also God's decree. This can be distinct. There is a will of command and a will of decree with God. I cannot go into this now, but we hope to do this in the third chapter, which shows that the will of God's command and the will of God's decree are not equivalent. However, the *command* to Jonah to preach judgment in Nineveh was God's decree. Even though the way must lead through the depths of the Mediterranean, God always fulfills His own Word. "Jonah, you may flee to the end of the world, but the LORD knows how to bring you to Nineveh." You may even fly to a country of your choice, child of the Lord, but when God wants you to go to another country, He knows how to get you there, even if it brings you through hell. That may cause much anguish as Jonah experienced. That is why the way of obedience is always the best and safest way. But what the devil had thought for evil for Jonah, God had thought for good.

Do you know what God always does when His people err? In this He glorifies His Name, be it right through sin. When the Lord has settled accounts with His people -and this always happens this side of the grave- God puts the enemy to shame for the sake of the honour of His Name. You can see this with Samson and David and also here with Jonah. For Jonah was not idle in the fish; no, he prayed.

"Behold, he prayeth." This was said of Paul when he was lying prostrate before the throne of God's grace, in the street called Straight, for three days and three nights.

Beloved reader, have we ever spent our night like this? "*With sleepless eyes and speechless grief I search the past to find relief.*" Or are we sleeping with Jonah at the bottom of the ship of our life? Then it is time for us to be thrown overboard. For true prayer is always born in the depth of affliction. We cannot learn to pray. Certainly, the Lord can

teach us, but we cannot learn by experience, I mean. True prayer is always born. I say once more: Not experience, but the ministry of the Holy Spirit teaches us to pray whatever the circumstances are. *"Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered"*, Romans 8:26.

There are many people who pray out of obedience. Well, there is nothing wrong with that, but if it stops there, it is not enough for eternity. The Lord teaches His people to pray out of the impossibility of circumstances. True praying is not practised until we have exhausted all our possibilities, when we do not know a way out and everything seems not just difficult but impossible.

There are people who pray for deliverance, but they already have the outcome in their pockets. Then it is quite easy to pray. Then anyone can pray, can't they? But true prayer is through faith, although the true praying person usually cannot take this to be faith because these prayers are said in impossible circumstances and generally lack beautiful wording. It is often no more than a groan to God, often only a cry from the heart.

Then you see your children drift into the world, mother, and from behind your kitchen-counter you sigh: "O Lord, Lord, Lord..." Most of the times you do not get any further. Necessity teaches you to pray. And when the Lord hides His sweet countenance for a long time so that you pine away because you cannot live on without Him, your groaning to God becomes shorter and shorter. Eventually you sit and stare vacantly in front of you and you become so insensitive and miserable that you wonder if there has ever been such a miserable creature on earth as you.

There are always people who say: "Just tell the Lord everything." But there is a people on earth who have nothing to tell any more because their misery has become too great. Do you know what they are waiting for? For their well-deserved punishment.

Well, are these God's children?

Yes, they are, for they often sail in Roman Catholic waters. So true prayer is born in need.

"Behold, he prayeth." God told Ananias Paul was praying. Ananias did not say this, no, the Lord said it. You sometimes hear people say: "That man has great gifts of prayer." But this does not mean much to me as long as it is not a God-given prayer.

"Behold, he prayeth." This could also be said of Jonah

when he was in the belly of the fish. Jonah cried out. There you have it again, this man had no time to consider quietly what he should pray. No, no. It says: *"I cried by reason of mine affliction unto the LORD, and He heard me, out of the belly of hell cried I, and Thou hearest my voice"*, verse 2.

True crying to God never goes unanswered. Will you keep this in mind? God always hears those who pray sincerely. I am not saying that the Lord answers immediately. No, the Lord usually tests whether it is the Lord they really want. Neither does it mean that prayer is always heard, but true prayer will surely be answered.

When God tests the faith of Abraham, the father of the faithful, by sacrificing his son to Him, you should not think that God will not test *you* as to the sincerity of your crying to Him. He who prays in truth always falls with his need on the side of God. This is always the mark of true prayer.

"For thou hadst cast me into the deep, in the midst of the seas..." Jonah did not pray: "LORD, now that the sailors have thrown me overboard, wilt thou have mercy upon me?" No, "God has thrown me overboard", he said. This is a discovery, a man does not say this just like that. If you end up in the hospital because of an accident, do you immediately say: "God has done this and I agree with it?" No, you first of all say: "The other motorist was to blame because I had the right of way." Be honest and admit it. I would have said the same. It is grace when a man does not.

But as long as we can blame somebody else still we have some air to breathe. But Jonah had no one else to blame but himself. He said: *"Thou hadst cast me..."*, and justly so. The sailors, LORD, are not to blame. I am the guilty one."

You understand? When the Lord wants to bestow grace on a person He makes you realize that your sins made you lose everything. Then it just reveals the beast in you, as with Asaph. For a man is no more than a beast.

The English revival preacher George Whitefield once said: "When God enters your life, He finds you as half a beast and half a devil." Whitefield only spoke of half a beast, but Asaph did not only become a *whole* beast, but also a *great* beast and Mephibosheth became a dead dog before king David.

But listen, I am not as bad as that.

No, I believe you are not, but I am even worse. No man by nature believes this. Asaph did not believe it until he went into God's sanctuary. Then God becomes his covenant-God because of the covenant-Mediator Who had been wounded in the house of His friends in his place. Jonah was

a man with grace, it is true, also when he fled away from the presence of the LORD. Therefore he cried to God mentioning His covenant-Name, the LORD, with capital letters. That is "JAHWEH, I AM THAT I AM."

Here a child of God was praying in the greatest trial of faith and satanic assaults. When Jonah went overboard the fish swallowed him and then he was in its belly among the stinking mass of rotting food.

Then Jonah began to cry unto the LORD because, to speak with all reverence, the LORD cried unto His child. God cannot do without His Church. Remember this! He loves His Bride with an everlasting love. But here on earth His Church can sometimes do without Him for a long time. The LORD complains about His people: "*Can a maid forget her ornaments, or a bride her attire? Yet My people have forgotten Me, days without number*", Jer. 2:32.

But the Lord knows how to get His people praying. He leads them in ways in which they cannot but cry unto God. The Lord gladly hears His people crying unto Him. Not because He has pleasure in afflicting them, but to grant further benefits to His Church. This usually happens in a way in which the people of God cry out with Jonah: "*All Thy waves and billows roaring o'er my troubled soul are pouring*".

But shall I tell you something? Jonah could still breathe in his distress, for in his need he still cried out unto God. However great your need may be, when you can still cry unto God in all your soul's distress, you are extremely blessed.

Suppose you cannot cry any more? Is this also possible?

Yes, it is. But this is even more distressing, for then you are not in need any more and that distresses even more. These are underground courses. You really don't desire this, because not every child of God experiences being forsaken by God. One man needs more uncovering than the other. It is God's sovereignty. But all God's children know something of what Jonah experienced. And when this takes place miles below sea-level, it is quite deep! But for Jonah the depth was not being miles below sea-level, but being cast out of God's sight. For this you need not literally go into the sea. It can also happen when you are in church. When the Lord has brought you into these ways of discovery, you sometimes are the only one in church. He who understands this, knows.

"Then I said, I am cast out of Thy sight, yet I will look again toward Thy holy temple", verse 4.

In all his heart-felt grief he exercised the wonderful 'yet'

of faith. He would never have prayed this on the ship, would he? That is why it had to go this way. Our way must go away so that *the Way* can be revealed in our lives, namely Christ. He says: "*I am the Way, the Truth and the Life*", John 14:6.

In order to learn this, your whole way of conversion does not count, for Christ only eats and drinks with whores and publicans. That is quite a lesson, friends. Then you go overboard with everything on which you secretly rested. In certain circles you only get your religion endorsed when you can relate a long story about your conversion and not one station may be missed. The genuineness of your conversion is tested by how long the train of your conversion stopped at each station. That is the slow train of the Pharisee and nothing but a system-religion, for if you have tasted something of the *liberty which is in Christ* you go through the story of your conversion with the speed of a fast train. I do not wish to be popular, but then you do not have enough time to declare the praise of Christ. When you have finished your story you will say: "Lord, I still have to begin." This is the language of all the true children of God, also in glory: "Lord, I still have to begin, for it is *through Thee, through Thee alone*."

The other day I heard about a boy who had experienced the salvation of his soul a short time before. Immediately two buses full of people visited him to learn all about it (how idolatrous). He saw the buses stop in front of his house while he was working in his garden. Having understood why they had come he put his shovel on the ground and said: "Friends, I can write the reason of your visit on the edge of my nail: Christ took my sins and I received His righteousness." And he simply went on digging. Nothing was left for the people but to go home. That boy gave glory to God. I like such conversion-stories, for only Christ and His work are glorified.

Now I agree with you.

Wait a moment. This must be experienced. It goes through death, hell and the grave. It goes through experience. Experience is a means to make you realize the truth and to make you share in the liberty that is in Christ. And this is something you will never attain to, *for bands and prisons will one day make out who are children of God*. Without prison there is never any question of liberty.

Oh, that the Lord once more should restore true communion among the true people of God, for there are hardly two who can walk together. But that people love justice, because they want to see Christ glorified. And when

this is not revealed in the preaching of the Gospel, a people is dying. And this is also the case in our informal gatherings.

If you want to meet together to talk about the work of God, it must really be about God's justice, in Christ, for that is to His glory. Then there should be no exaggerated stories, but you should testify from the fullness of the heart, like the Samaritan woman: "*Come, see a Man, Who told me all things that I ever did: is not This the Christ?*" John 4:29.

There are far too many scribes nowadays. In former times God's people only talked about the glory of Christ. This is hardly found in our days, for if you do you are superficial. But I have nothing more than Christ and if you think this is too light you just fill your pockets with a lot of stones. That seems orthodox, but it is godless.

So Jonah was in the belly of the fish as an unregenerated sinner in his own opinion. He had nobody to talk to. There he was, in the midst of rotting scraps of food and with seaweed twisted around his head.

When you have found yourselves in the stench of your own sins, you lose all your self-righteousness. Then you loathe yourself and you say: "Lord, it is a hopeless matter." Then you will not have any friends left. As long as you have something to share it is not that bad and you usually have a house full of people. But when you get troubles you also lose your friends. In order to have only God as your Portion you must lose all your friends. Then the only thing left is: "*Give me Jesus else I die, for there is no life outside of Jesus, but only the eternal destruction of the soul...*"

These are the people who truly pray, or rather, this is true praying.

When we come to know the Person of Christ we also receive steadfastness in afflictions. Just look at Jonah. Despite this hopeless situation God made him trust only in Him.

There is a people on earth who experience: "*The eye of the Lord is upon them that fear Him, upon them that hope in His mercy; to deliver their soul from death and to keep them alive in famine. Our soul waiteth for the Lord, He is our help and our shield. For our heart shall rejoice in Him because we have trusted in His holy Name.*"

God's people may well forget God, but God cannot forget His people. "*Can a woman forget her sucking child that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee,*" Is. 49:15.

God could never forget Jonah, although he did forget God when he had fallen asleep in the bottom of the ship.

When Jonah fled from the presence of the LORD he

thought: "Now I shall not think of God any more." But when he went overboard he thought: "Now God will not think of me any more. Now I am undone for ever."

But Christ went down in the waves of the wrath of God never to be remembered by God again. For He cried out: "*My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?*" so that Jonah would never more be forsaken by God. "*Jonah, I have graven thee upon the palms of My hands; thy walls are continually before Me,*" Is. 49:16. This is God's everlasting faithfulness for people who know experimentally that they are covenant-breakers. Then the LORD said, as it were, to His straying servant: "Jonah, you live at My expense. I have paid your trip. You need not sail back, Jonah. I shall bring you back Myself, *for I am God and there is none else.* But I will make you sink so deep into the sea, Jonah, that you will cry out to Me again, for I want to hear your voice so gladly, My child."

Verse two says that Jonah had cried to God. And the LORD heard his voice, his supplications and lamentations.

If our crying always goes unanswered we have never yet really cried. But God made Jonah cry and He heard. On the ship Jonah could do without God, no problem at all. But God could not do without Jonah. So He held Jonah under water until he cried unto God again. Now Jonah could not do without God either because he loved Him. And love makes one cry. The law does not. The law only oppresses. The law is only satisfied with perfect obedience.

So the law does not listen to the crying of a lost sinner. The law says: "Sinner, I have nothing to do with you, for you deserve death. I cannot let you live. I must kill you. I shall drown you."

But Christ suffered Himself to be drowned in the waves of the wrath of God and He was in the grave of the earth for three days and three nights. Why? To still the wrath of God at sin. When Jonah went overboard Christ said to the law as it were: "You cannot bring in anything against Jonah, holy law, for I was drowned in Jonah's place and by virtue of My merited righteousness I provide a fish to save Jonah, for he lives at the expense of My finished work, both in life and in death."

During His life on earth Christ perfectly fulfilled the law. He said: "*Its written in its roll. Thy will is My delight; I cherish day and night Thy law in heart and soul.*" Before commanding His spirit into the hands of His Father, He paid the uttermost farthing with: "*It is finished!*" Then hell trembled on its foundations and the law kept silent within me and I had no more accusers.

This is a great secret, friends, for we do not experience law and Gospel as matters which are mingled, but they are completely distinct. The law is not mingled with the Gospel, but the law precedes the Gospel. This is a secret, a secret of salvation. Do you know what Luther said? "If you know the distinction between law and Gospel, you can have my doctor's diploma."

There are always people who know beforehand already that they will be or are saved. But God does not deliver His people before judgment, but through judgment. And now love begins to cry, as I have already written. Before judgment love begins to cry. "*I found trouble and sorrow.*" The law can only oppress, but love produces sorrow. That is the drawing love of the Father.

"*Lord*", the murderer on the cross said, "*remember me when Thou comest into Thy Kingdom.*" What preceded this? This: "*And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds, but this Man has done nothing amiss*", Luke 23:41.

Do you know when God will justify you? When you will justify God in all His will and way. And that is what murderers, publicans, whores and the ungodly do, for that is what *man* is. However, there are only few who believe this.

If you have never yet admitted to God what you are, you will never be saved. This is not a condition, but the work of the Holy Spirit. We also see this with Jonah in the position of life. "*I went down to the bottom of the mountains; the earth with her bars was about me for ever*", verse 6.

Here Jonah confirms his own sentence, not under duress but willingly. After all, it was an established fact. Here Jonah says, that is to say in his own perception, for an instant he experienced eternity without God. He says: "*The earth with her bars was about me for ever.*" So he had reached a point where he was forever barred from ever having communion with God. In the twinkling of an eye he experienced that relief was absolutely impossible if the Lord had not delivered him in a wonderful way.

Not until after you have faced this do you talk about it. But do you know what the miracle was with Jonah? Jonah did not say: "I have gone down..." No, but "*I went down to the bottom of the mountains.*" Jonah speaks here in the past tense. For though it is in the present, you do not talk about it. Then you are strangled by the law. But with Jonah Christ had become his Head. Jonah experienced what Isaiah 54 verse 8 says: "*In a little wrath I hid My face from thee for a moment; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the LORD, thy Redeemer.*"

But he was still in the fish, wasn't he?

Yes, he was, but faith speaks of things as if they are there. God had heard his supplication and by faith he already testified to the deliverance. Therefore the fish did not cause him any anxiety any more.

There is a people on earth who at times live in liberty even though they are in prison.

I once heard about a man who because of his faith had been tied to a pole for three days and three nights. People thought he would be glad when he regained his freedom. But he said: "For three days and three nights I have walked in the liberty of Christ with all the children of God and I shall miss this spot very much."

John was a prisoner at Patmos, but was allowed to walk in the glorious liberty of Christ.

In many circles it is claimed this is not experienced any more. The same they say of the pardoning of sins. I recently heard a sermon read in which it was claimed that before taking up the Child Jesus in his arms the old, exercised prophet Simeon still went through the world without his sins being forgiven. Foolishness! This is holding down the Word of God in unrighteousness. People no longer want to believe God is a God Who forgives sins. I do not know any sin but the sin against the Holy Ghost which is worse than the sin of preaching a life of grace without the forgiveness of sin. When this is done deliberately, it will eventually become the sin against the Holy Ghost.

There are preachers who preach a life of faith without the experience of the forgiveness of sins. This is an awful doctrine. It is purely Roman Catholic! How many orthodox churches have turned Roman Catholic because of this heresy? Nowadays it is a miracle if it is different.

When you speak about Christ you are suspect nowadays. When you testify of Christ and speak about the work of God, people will shun you, for this is suspicious in our days. But the religious establishment also shunned Christ, for the servant is not greater than his Lord. My flesh is not interested in it, but God is. And if the Lord visits me, I also become interested in it.

I am fully aware the Gospel of free grace is grossly abused by the 'Hallelujah-Christianity'. But woe are we when we throw suspicion on the true work of grace. As if God does not work this any more.

I like a separating preaching, between false and true, but one which portrays Christ in all His offices. Then the preaching is also Trinitarian and the Triune God is proclaimed in all His perfections, operations and attributes.

According to me the devil feels very much at home in churches where Christ is omitted from the preaching. Christ is omitted when a Christ is preached without the forgiveness of sin. Christ is also omitted when a Gospel is preached without the ministry of the law which precedes the Gospel. This is not a condition, but purely scriptural-experimental. If you and I know about this it must be possible to ask in love how you have come by it. Did you steal it or did you receive it honestly? This is a fundamental difference. This distinction also arises in a preaching in which the whole counsel of God is preached.

What in fact is the whole counsel of God? That is Jesus Christ and Him crucified. It is calling, justification, sanctification and glorification. It is election, Christmas, Easter, Ascension Day, Pentecost and the restoration of all things. For then God shall be *All in all*.

Look, the devil does not object at all against preaching justification, if only you omit sanctification. And in reverse you may spend much time on sanctification as long as you do not talk about justification. You may speak about Christ, but only if it is about a Christ without blood. You may speak about God, but only if it is a God without election. You may speak about the Holy Spirit, provided it is not about the indwelling Spirit. FOOLISHNESS!

I will continue.

So Jonah was still in the fish, but he rejoiced in free grace, for he said: "...yet Thou hast brought up my life from corruption." It says: "brought up." Christ descended into hell and He brought up His people from the hell of their ruin! Hence that in the midst of his plight Jonah was already able to rejoice in God. Only faith can do this, for faith looks to God and in God there is no doubt. Faith calls forth things as if they are already there. This is true of the slightest particle of faith. The little ones are also included. And then I do not refer to the little ones as are spoken about nowadays. In certain denominations it is contended that the little ones are still unconscious of their faith. This is another new type of religion. These people are always talking about an unconscious faith, an unconscious justification and an unconscious Christ. Imagine they become conscious of it! No, these people do not want to have anything to do with this, although they do not say that out loud. For if it becomes conscious they feel lost and their unconscious religion had fully included them. Do you see how deceitful this is? O, do not eternally be deceived, readers. Do not rest before you are consciously hidden in Christ by faith.

At any rate, Jonah could not live from all these

unconscious things, for he was in the midst of reality. With Job he rejoices in free grace on the ashes of his existence. "*I know that my Redeemer liveth.*" This is what all the children of God experience. I am not saying it is their daily experience, for the days of darkness shall be many. But in God there is no darkness, neither is there darkness in His Son. Christ is the Light of the world and sometimes we are enabled to testify of it. This also happens *in afflictions*, for this glorifies God more than *after* having been afflicted, although the latter is exercised more often than the former.

Jonah exercised it *in his affliction*. Then it is even more glorious when real deliverance is there. Jonah could say: "*I know Whom I have believed.*"

Nowadays people would rather reserve the Word of God as a 'perhaps'. But the Word of God does not work a 'perhaps', reader. Luke, the evangelist, says: "*Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration of those things, which are most surely believed among us.*"

As to salvation the Roman Catholics, the Arminians and many neonomian preachers nowadays say: "You can never be sure about it." There are even those who say: "When I stand before the judgment-seat of Christ anything is possible." What kind of religion is that? The apostle Peter says: "*Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness*", 2 Pet. 3:13.

The true people of God cry out with Jonah: "*Yet hast Thou brought up my life from corruption, O Lord, my God.*" This is not done in a hidden corner. This will be the miraculous aspect of it.

This people will know from what great need and death God has delivered and will deliver them. This is something that is assailed, that is another thing. And it can be assailed so much that the received grace has totally disappeared from view. For remember, friends, the true Zionists are in their own estimation constantly on their way to hell. But nevertheless Christ's work of salvation is not done in a corner. It is no 'perhaps', but sure! Then there are also the trials of faith which are more precious than all gold, money and earthly goods. Therefore, people of God, you must count on many impossibilities and many afflictions and many deaths for you to die.

"But when the righteous cry, the Lord in mercy hears their pleas; He graciously delivers them from all their miseries. The Lord is always near."

So Jonah was able to speak of deliverance while still being in the fish. We must particularly point out to you that

Jonah's deliverance did not lie in his being delivered out of the fish, but that God answered him. Many people rejoice in the miracle, but Jonah rejoiced in God. That is a great difference. The psalmist does not say: "I rejoice in the miracle..." No, he says: "*For this I know that God is at my side, in Him, Whose Word I praise, I do confide. He heard my voice when in my fears I cried. The Lord is my Defender.*"

During the flood in Holland in 1953 half of the Netherlands was in great distress. There has been some talk of God's judgment. But when judgment was averted many people said: "It is a miracle that the dikes have not given way. It is a great miracle." But where was the God of the miracle? NO ANSWER!

So you see that people can admire the miracle and yet be totally blind to its Author. Only one of those ten lepers came back to give glory to God. The other nine cried out: "It is a miracle we have been cured." Oh yes, it is a great miracle, but they forgot the Benefactor. The Samaritan, the half Jew, we would say, did not. He could not live without the Benefactor, for he went back and gave glory to Him.

So did Jonah. He gave glory to God for everything and did not stop in the miracle itself. This will be presently confirmed when the fish vomits Jonah out upon the dry land. Jonah does not even raise his hands because of the miracle, for his deliverance did not so much lie in his being delivered out of the fish, as in the fact that God delivered him. When God savingly comes into your life, the centre-point is not your deliverance, but the God of your deliverance: "*My Saviour is my God!*"

Do we also know about this, readers? For God does not afflict you because He delights in it, but that you should cry unto God for God.

In his own estimation Jonah was so far away from God in the belly of the fish that his soul fainted within him. He felt such great anguish, trouble and anxiety that he thought he would breathe his last. When God's children must breathe their last, it is not bad, for then they will forever breathe in God. But when this happens in times when they are forsaken by God it is an awful thing, even for God's children. And this is often the experience of those who fear God in truth. If you have never experienced what Jonah is talking about here, it is to be feared that your religion is just imagination.

But the Lord does not leave His children in death, for it is written: "*When my soul fainted within me, I remembered the LORD*", verse 7.

Why did Jonah remember the LORD? Because the LORD

remembered Jonah. Jonah remembered God by the grace the Holy Spirit called to his remembrance. After all, it is wicked when we do not remember God, for God is for ever worthy to be remembered. But now the miracle: From everlasting God has had thoughts of peace about His Church. Now we must point out to you that Jonah's remembering the LORD did not consist solely of some thoughts. For this was a fruit of faith. True praying is also a fruit of faith, as Jonah indeed practised it here. For he said: "*My prayer came unto Thee, unto Thine holy temple*", verse 7b. Jonah's prayer penetrated right through the fish, right through the waters of the Mediterranean, right through the clouds, reaching into heaven. Jonah got free access to the throne of grace. "*For through Him we have access by one Spirit unto the Father*", Eph. 2:18.

Because Christ bowed more deeply than Jonah, Jonah received free access to the Father by the Spirit. When the Spirit of Christ is in us we have free access to God, through faith. Jonah's prayer was born when he was heavily afflicted. The deeper the valley of affliction, the higher the top of faith. The more the pendulum of the clock of discovery moves to the left, the more the pendulum of deliverance moves to the right. Jonah was not straitened in his bowels while still being in the belly of the fish, but this did not last long. But it also remains true: the farther on the way of life, the less knowledge of Christ in one's own estimation. The God fearing Samuel Rutherford says: "Oh, if only I could spell His Name, Oh, if only I could believe once." But those who do not believe, do believe, and those who do not pray, do pray. It sounds paradoxical, it is true, but he who is not a stranger to this, knows it.

So, the deeper you sink, the higher your prayer rises. These are not conditions, but it is God's own work. So Jonah was able to testify of the work of God while still being in the belly of the fish. But he did something else as well. He also condemned his disobedience. He had fallen on to God's side. He said: "*They that observe lying vanities forsake their own mercy*", verse 8.

What does this mean? In fact he said: "This disobedient prophet from Canaan observed lying vanities and through his own fault forsook the mercy between God and his soul!" Here mercy can also be translated by 'peace'. Jonah actually said: "By faith I had peace between God and my soul, but I have robbed myself of this peace." And when this peace with God was once more restored, Jonah could not but speak about it even in the belly of the fish: "*But I will sacrifice unto Thee with the voice of thanksgiving. I will pay*

that that I have vowed. Salvation is of the LORD", verse 9.

God has no slaves, but a willing people in the day of His power. This is a fruit of the willingness of Christ. For if His willingness does not fill the heart, God's people often go against the grain. But the Lord lets His people choose willingly, on the basis of election. For their choice is a fruit of His electing love. When God lets His people choose, they have first been placed on His side. Then Jonah once more chooses willingly for the service of the LORD, for he says: "*I will pay that that I have vowed.*"

What had Jonah promised? That he would go to Nineveh? I do not read this anywhere. God had commissioned him to go, but he had not promised to do it. What does he mean then?

This severe trial reminded Jonah of his *office* as a prophet. When Jonah fled away from God he denied his office. In virtue of his office he committed sin. He sinned against his office, just like Samson did when he let Delilah cut off his long hair which was a token of his separation. Then Samson became powerless and the Philistines put out his eyes. When Peter denied the Lord Jesus he also sinned himself out of his office. Sins committed by people holding an office are more severely punished than personal sins. Then Jonah had to go right through the Mediterranean, for God does not pass by disobedience in silence. Then Samson had to lose his eyes, David a child and Simon Peter his name, so that the glory of God would rise out of the dust.

Just as the slave in Exodus 21 chose the side of his master, Jonah willingly chose God's side to serve Him wherever He might send him. And Jonah had broken this agreement. For every office-bearer whether converted or not, has by virtue of his office an agreement with the great Office-bearer, Christ. This is not without obligation office. Every bearer is a legitimate office-bearer, provided he has been called by God. And when God calls a person to hold an office, he becomes a servant of God and a servant has greater responsibility than a child has, for a child is free. Therefore the Child became a Servant to take upon Himself the responsibility of the fall for those He has redeemed with His blood. For a servant has authority over many of his master's subjects. Now it is of great importance that a servant also shares the portion of the child. For an unregenerate office-bearer is a great obstacle to a congregation. I cannot go into this now, but I could write a separate book on this. But here it is about the sins committed by someone who holds an office, in this case the prophet Jonah.

He was disobedient and had gone his own way. To be restored into God's favour again always requires the loss of one's own will to will what God wills. Every office-bearer has a covenant with Christ. A covenant entails rights and duties. When an office-bearer neglects his duties he forfeits his rights. We see this with Samson. But now the miracle for Jonah and for all the servants called by God: "*If we believe not, yet He abideth faithful: He cannot deny Himself*", 2 Tim. 3:13.

God's children can fall low, writer.

Yes, they can, but God and His own work do not change. And this faithfulness of God had become such a great and perpetual miracle for Jonah that he cried out: "*But I will sacrifice unto Thee with the voice of thanksgiving, I will pay that which I have vowed. Salvation is of the LORD.*"

Jonah would do anything to serve the LORD. He wanted to sacrifice everything, even his life. Just like the slave in Exodus 21 wanted to serve his master willingly, so Jonah wanted to serve his God again. This covenant between a slave and his master was sealed with blood in the Old Testament. I shall quote Exodus 21 verses 2-6 about the slave: "*If thou buy a Hebrew servant, six years he shall serve: and in the seventh he shall go out free for nothing. If he came in by himself, he shall go out by himself: if he were married, then his wife shall go out with him. If his master have given him a wife, and she have born him sons or daughters, the wife and her children shall be her master's, and he shall go out by himself. And if the servant shall plainly say, I love my master, my wife and my children; I will not go out free: Then his master shall bring him unto the judges; he shall also bring him to the door, or unto the door post; and his master shall bore his ear through with an awl; and he shall serve him for ever.*"

Such a slave stayed willingly with that master and that was sealed with blood. This applies equally to the life of grace. For the Lord makes His people and servants willing in His service. "*My heart is steadfast, o my God, and I will sing unto Thy laud. Yes, I will make a melody and give my thanks, o LORD, to Thee.*"

Then the LORD remembers His covenant again because He is the Faithful One.

"And the LORD spake unto the fish, and it vomited out Jonah upon the dry land", verse 10. "God spoke and it was done. He set all creation firm on its foundation", Ps 33:9. Word and deed are the same with God.

God restored Jonah to His favour and re-established him

in his office. Why? Because Christ's willingness had broken his heart once more. And when God sees Christ's willingness in His people again, Jonah does not remain under water a second longer. Then, at God's command, he was at once spewed out by the fish. Then Jonah experienced that the Testament (inheritance) of Christ was confirmed to him again: *"And lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world"*, Matth. 28:20.

May I ask you, reader: Have you become partakers of the inheritance of Christ? Or do we still stick to our covenant with the devil and our agreement with hell? It is one or the other. Either we share in the privileges of the covenant of grace because of our interest in Christ, or we are still in the broken covenant of works because of our unreconciled state with God.

Dear reader, *"If the LORD be God, then follow Him, but if Baal, then follow him"*, 1 Kings 18:21b.

Joshua had made a heartfelt choice in his life because God had elected him from eternity. So Joshua's choice was a choice which the LORD had worked, for a man does not choose for Jesus and certainly not for the cross, for this costs all of one's flesh! But yet His yoke is easy and His burden light.

Come, reader, put your heart to it. Is the Lord not worthy to be served and feared? His service is such a sweet service and His commandments are not grievous. Please, do not start to do your best, because the more Joshua says: *"But as for Me and My house, I will serve the LORD!"*

3. JONAH'S PREACHING

"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", verses 1-2.

After Jonah had been vomited on to the dry land by the fish the word of the LORD immediately came to the prophet again. This was a miracle, for Jonah had forfeited the command. But the LORD performs His counsel be it even right through sin. Jonah had to get ready and travel straight to Nineveh.

God's commands cannot suffer delay. God hastens to gather His Church from the four corners of the earth so that His house is filled and His Kingdom comes.

There is a people on earth who can look forward to that Kingdom and at times cry out: *"God of life, O when shall I come again to stand before Thee in Thy temple, and adore Thee?"*

However, the people of God must wait out God's appointed time. And so must Jonah. The LORD still had work for His servant in Assyria. But Jonah did not want this. The preceding chapters tell us so. Jonah fled from the presence of the LORD. But the LORD knew how to bring His servant back where He wanted him to be.

Jonah had had a miraculous voyage. God had brought him back to His path through the depths of the Mediterranean. But there was more to it. Do you know what I believe? That God's very path was right through the Mediterranean.

But Jonah fled away from God, didn't he?

Yes, he did, only to fall into the arms of Christ. This may seem to be a mysterious way of talking, but I cannot help it. The only thing I point out to you is that Christ refers to Jonah's stay in the fish as a sign of His burial. Christ was buried because of Jonah's sins. But this is a secret of salvation. False religion does not understand anything about this. The fish is a type of God's pleasure. Christ is this for God's people. God's people may rise with Christ out of the grave. Jonah rose out of the sea-grave. The fish was not a grave for Jonah, the sea was. The fish is a type of Christ. And Jonah was in Christ, so he could never perish. God's children

are always safe, even if they are in the midst of death! How terrible to be in it -in death- I mean. Jonah was no longer in death. Indeed, delivered from death by free grace.

Jonah, the missionary, was at last on his way to the mission-field, to Nineveh. But he was to announce a judgment of destruction to Nineveh because the wickedness of the Ninevites had come up before God.

As to this I think we can also remember the times of Noah when the wickedness of the children of men had also come up before God. But then judgment could not be averted. Why not? Because God's command of the coming flood was also His decree, and this justly so. The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah likewise shows us this. Even Abraham's prayers could not reverse God's decrees. God is just in His judgment. He does not act arbitrarily, but according to His determinate counsel and foreknowledge. To speak with all reverence, God does not work after the fact. All things are naked and open to the eyes of Him with Whom we have to do. When the sins of the Ninevites have come up before God, He does not adapt His decree.

There are many people who think God changes His decree when, for example, people better their lives. They dispose of television and become regular church-goers. That is not wrong in itself. If only all people threw this devilish thing away and went to church every Sunday! But God does not change because of this. God remains the Immutable One, both for His people and the unconverted.

Do you know that God's immutability becomes a miracle for God's people every time again? For they change from day to day. God can never rely on His people, but they can always rely on Him. *"For I am the LORD, I change not, therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed"*, Mal. 3:6. This had become true for Jonah again. He had not been consumed in the belly of the fish because God is the Immutable One.

"If we believe not, yet He abideth faithful; He cannot deny Himself."

Do you know what I believe? That Jonah after having been vomited on to the dry land by the fish cried out: *"I am a foolish and vile rebel who deserves nothing but hell, but God is the Faithful One."*

Have you ever experienced God's faithfulness, reader? Jonah has, for: *"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."*

This was a great miracle for Jonah, for these words of God showed he was restored to his office. The LORD did not

say: "Jonah, I do not need you any more, for you have sinned too much; leave My sight forever."

No, God's glory did not allow this. God is always glorified in His own work. Jonah had received this command and now the LORD Himself saw to it that Jonah carried it out. But this was indeed a great miracle for Jonah, for he had been disobedient and had sinned himself out of communion with God. God's people can sin themselves out of His communion, but never out of His heart. For God does not behold iniquity in Jacob, neither perverseness in Israel. He looks on His people in the face of His Son Who covers them with the robe of righteousness, drenched in the blood of atonement. That does not mean that God does not punish His people because of their sins: *"Though Thou tookest vengeance of their inventions."*

Certainly, look at Jonah. But these are fatherly chastisements and not judicial punishments. For the psalmist says: *"Thy people Thou hast from their guilt set free; Thou didst forgive all their iniquity."* God does not punish His people as a Judge, but as a Father. Our heavenly Father may at times give a hard kick, but He remains your Father, people of God. When you are without chastisement, you are a bastard and not a son. For as many as He loves, He rebukes and chastens. O, that we would comfort one another with these words.

There is a people on earth who may taste honey on the rod because they are fatherly chastisements. Then you will say: "Lord, Thou art just in all Thy will and way. I am only firewood for hell."

Horizontalism, superficial religion, does not say this. It walks in the light with Jesus, but does not realize it walks in its own artificial light. But God takes different ways with His people. *"The righteous man will grieve; He many troubles may endure. The Lord will free him from them all; His help is ever sure."*

When you fear God you must expect you are in for many afflictions, so that you should depend fully on Him. This is His goal also in true conversion. You may always have thought to keep the leak above water. But there came a moment in your life that you cried out: "Throw me overboard, for I am to blame."

Nowadays you hear so little about guilt, but God does not condone guilt, even the guilt of His people. When God begins to bestow grace on His people, it goes through a flat field.

"Lift up your voice and sing aloud, to Him Who rides upon the clouds, high in the spacious heavens. The LORD, that is His

glorious Name. Sing unto Him with loud acclaim; to Him be glory given."

In the way of justification God forgives the sins of His people once and forever. But He requires us to confess our sins daily. Not to be cleansed by blood again as if a new sacrifice had to be made, for that happens once and for all in justification. But in daily conversion it is necessary to be cleansed by the water of the Spirit. The washing of the feet of the disciples teaches us this. The Lord Jesus says: "Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you", John 15:3.

"He that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit", John 13:10.

The washing of the feet refers to the daily cleansing of the heart. It points to holiness. When the soldier pierced the side of the Lord Jesus with a spear, blood and water came out. The blood paints to justification and the water to sanctification. Christ's heart was pierced to adopt His people through blood and water which flowed from His mediatorial heart. Therefore the psalmist confessed his sins in order to be restored to communion with God.

*"To Thee, O God of justice and compassion,
I then at last acknowledged my transgression.
I said, 'I will confess my sins to Thee',
and all my guilt Thou hast forgiven me."*

This was also Jonah's experience. When Jonah was right with God again he could get ready to preach judgment in Nineveh. If things are not right between God and your soul you cannot possibly rebuke sins in others. If you do, you are a Pharisee. But then it has a devastating effect because it is not done by faith which works by love.

Meanwhile Jonah had arrived at the city of Nineveh and, on the authority of the LORD, he preached and announced judgment that the city would be destroyed. He delivered a clear sermon: "Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown", verse 4.

Why is it so dark nowadays? Because Jonah's preaching is missing. In a measure there is a more liberal preaching of the law and a stricter preaching of the Gospel. The law does not condemn and the Gospel does not pardon sin any more. Law and Gospel are often mingled. That is why there are so many half-saved people. "Yes", they say, "I have experienced a lot..., but..." These souls always talk about a 'but'. But..., now I also use a 'but', those 'buts' which the preaching is mostly guilty of. And so souls are deceived for eternity.

According to me there are very few preachers nowadays who preach like Jonah did. Most of them preach on their own authority. They preach a superficial religion including what man should do and should not do. This kind of preachers misrepresents the fact about the Gospel of salvation. Please, throw all this ethical rubbish into the garbage can!

Jonah preached the burden of the LORD. This was not at all pleasing to the ear. He sowed, so to speak, death and destruction!

I recently read the booklet "THE MISSIONARY DAVID BRAINARD". What a precious booklet! David Brainard was also a remarkable missionary among the native Americans. He did not turn the Gospel into a "First Aid", but he preached law and Gospel, clearly distinct from each other.

When Brainard preached to the Indians he thundered out the law over them because of their sins and idolatry. And the LORD worked with him. For many Indians cried out because they discovered the burden of their sins. The preaching of the law is just as indispensable as the preaching of the Gospel. Brainard's preaching resulted in a great revival among the Indians. Of course, redemption only comes through the Gospel. But the law paves the way to Christ. "For Christ is the End of the law for righteousness, to everyone that believeth", Rom. 10:4.

Nowadays it is claimed that a missionary should first of all preach the Gospel. Well, I do not read that Jonah did this. Neither did David Brainard. For by the law is the knowledge of sin. In the Name of God sin must be shown and this is done in the first place by preaching the law.

Today people rather preach about a loving God, but nothing happens. Jonah preached "death and destruction" and all Nineveh responded. "They believed God", it says. It does not say they believed Jonah. The Ninevites first and foremost believed that Jonah's preaching was a divine message. Most church-goers do not believe this nowadays, for they want the world in one hand and God in the other, also in most orthodox reformed circles. They no longer believe that the preaching of sovereign grace comes from God. If they did, they would surely repent. Do you know what I believe? That when 'regular' church-goers refuse to repent God will send His faithful servants to the most wicked places.

But writer, what do you mean by 'wanting the world in one hand and God in the other'?

1. Well, we must begin with the most venomous thing: the Gospel in the mouth and walking hand in hand with

Moses to do this and to do that to create sanctification beside the sanctification of Christ, but at the same time partakers of the Lord Supper. These people are the biggest enemies of Christ.

2. Going through life like a chameleon. This is a double-faced and a double-tongued life. Joining in the conversation and weeping of God's people and joining in the conversation and laughter of the world, but at the same time partakers of the Lord's Supper.

3. Women in men's clothes or/and their hair cut, but at the same time partakers of the Lord's Supper.

Mentioned partakers of the Lord's Supper eat and drink themselves damnation, not discerning the Lord's Body. It is not only sin because the Word of God forbids it, but also because the love of God hates all sins. We could multiply the list endlessly. But let us begin with ourselves. Then you will have enough work for your whole life. If you can still live in sin, friends, you must realize you have never yet tasted the true love of God in your soul. Then you can walk to the Lord's Table with a pious face, but finally it is the devil who leads you there.

I cannot help mentioning one more thing. When parents sincerely fear the Lord and their children live like antinomians so that the Name of the Lord is blasphemed, something fundamental is wrong. For example: Father and mother at the Lord's Table and their children in the pub. That cannot be! There is no discipline any more! Many church-buildings bear the name 'Rehoboth', but 'Ichabod' is more suited.

Now I am not saying that lost sons and daughters cannot break out into sins. This occurs in the most godly families. But when godly parents do not impress their children by their outward way of life, something is wrong in their daily communion with God. Then there is an Eli-spirit. Eli did not wish to restrain his wicked sons Hophni and Phinehas. He did not warn them against sins. This Eli-spirit is rampant nowadays. People do not even bother about hallowing the Lord's Day any more. Many children go out for a walk on the Lord's Day and father and mother sleep in.

Do you know what is lacking then? Jonah's preaching! For Jonah preached with power and majesty of the Holy Spirit. He preached on the authority of his Sender. This is lacking everywhere in our churches. The Spirit has begun to depart. Why? Because sins are no longer openly rebuked in family, church and state!

"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", verse 5.

Jonah's preaching had an immediate effect upon young and old. Jonah did not bring this about, but the authority of the Holy Spirit did. On the ground of Scripture I tell you: when God sends a servant of Him to a certain congregation with a divine message, the preaching is bound to be effective. When it does not produce any effect one has never been called or sent by God. Either your preaching or your calling is not from God. However, the effect of the true preaching is always twofold, for it says, *"For we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in those who are saved and in those who perish: to the one we are the savour of death unto death, and to the other the savour of life unto life"*, 2 Cor. 2:15-16.

In the days of Noah, nobody came to true conversion. His preaching of 120 years beared no fruit, only hardening of hearts, but that was the deadly effect of his preaching in according to God's will, because of the terrible sin in those days, which ended in the deadly flood. And in the last days, it will be as in the days of Noah, for it says, *"And as it was in the days of Noah, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of Man: They ate, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all. Likewise also as it was in the days of Lot: They ate, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they built; but the same day that Lot went out of Sodom, it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all. Even thus shall it be in the Day when the Son of Man is revealed"*, Luke 17:26-30.

However, there are many false preachers in our days who blame the church-members and they themselves keep their hats on. But friends, a true servant of God will blame himself in order to discover that desperate cases call for desperate remedies.

Concerning this matter a preacher said to me once: "I don't want any turmoil in our congregation."

You see, some value their position too much. Some even dare not restrain the congregation, let alone preach the thunder of the law on the authority of the Holy Spirit.

Rev. Samuel Rutherford preached the law with authority. He did not always address the congregation with: "Beloved congregation", but often with: "Painted hypocrites!"

I am not saying one should imitate him, for the church has enough mimics and imitators.

But Jonah was deemed worthy. He preached: "Wicked Ninevites, enemies of the people of the LORD, I preach

judgment to you: "Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown!"

"This is hard as a stone, isn't it?" some people would say nowadays. Of course it is, because the average church-goer wants to hear the Gospel. "That sounds somewhat sweeter, that is much more pleasing to my tender heart", people would say nowadays. Many people would say: "Just listen Jonah, you should not expect people to be brought to believe by such a fire and brimstone preaching. "I am awfully sorry, but it does happen", Jonah would have answered.

Many theologians have exchanged the doctrine of justification of the godless for the doctrine of regeneration and lull their listeners to sleep with some marks. But this is unlike Jonah. Jonah preached death in man! But also God's mercy. "Yet forty days..."

"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", verse 5.

If faith does not result in an outward reformation, there is no question of true faith! For the inside reforms the outside. If only the outside is reformed, there is still a devil inside, only one which is neatly packaged. And when we search our own hearts we shall discover that we should not seek the devil in our neighbour, but in ourselves. For my heart is filled with fluttering devils!

Why do you emphasize this so much?

Because in all churches a spirit prevails that one is converted (in one's own eyes) without walking it out and forsaking the world, because one is not dead to the law through the law.

What is conversion?

The mortification of the old and the quickening of the new man. The Bible teaches us two kinds of conversion: conversion *before* faith and conversion *by* faith. So there is faith before true saving faith.

I have never yet heard of this, writer.

That is because you lack true conversion. We do not know these concepts in our days, but I want to bring them to your notice.

In conversion before faith (legalistic conversion) the old man is held under the law. The old man stands for every unconverted human being by nature. After regeneration, it says, "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature:

old things are passed away; behold, all things have become new", 2 Cor. 5:17.

The law condemns everyone who is under the law. If it is experience, then we are not going from better to best, but from worse to worst.

So in the way of legalistic conversion *before* regeneration, the sinner is led to a knowledge of his wretched state before God in the way of true conviction. The way leading to Christ is a way to hell. For Christ reveals Himself to a lost sinner on the brink of hell. Then the sinner believes God at His Word, like the Ninevites believed the preaching of Jonah, by accepting eternal punishment.

And this is something personal! Then the sinner is made to believe God in His judgment upon sins. This faith precedes true saving faith. For what did the Ninevites do? They justified God in His judgments by faith in the law. Was this saving faith? This faith is not saving as such, it precedes saving faith. We do know what the Lord Jesus says in Matthew 12:41: "*The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with the generation, and shall condemn it because they repented at the preaching of Jonah.*"

How shall the men of Nineveh condemn others when they were condemned themselves? The conversion among the Ninevites by means of Jonah's preaching was real.

This is the order, first conviction of sin, the sinner will be condemned by the law. And that goes, as we already said, from worse to worst. Not as a result of true faith in Christ, but as a result of the ministry of the law. The ministry of the law is the ministration of dead, for it Paul says: "*For I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God*", Gal. 2:19. That means the spiritual death of the old man and then it says, "*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*", Gal. 2:20.

The Ninevites humbled themselves in sackcloth and ashes before God. This may remain sheer legalism, but Matthew 12:41 teaches us the true conversion among the Ninevites. True conversion and true faith belong together. They were not only convinced of sin, righteousness and judgment, but also brought to submit through grace. And grace cries out for grace.

Do you pretend, writer, that all these Ninevites turned to God?

I do not say this, but the Lord Jesus Himself says so in Matthew 12:41. At Jonah's preaching and by the

efficacious operation of the Holy Spirit the Ninevites were brought to detest themselves in dust and ashes before God. The law laid them in the dust and grace drew them to God in Christ Who bestowed faith on them. The Lord was merciful to them in judgment.

The law is at the service of the Gospel, not a part of it. The law can indeed strike a sinner down, but the law can never raise him up. The law could indeed make the Ninevites creep in the dust, but never make them rise on the day of judgment to condemn the generation of the unbelieving Jews. For to rise on the day of judgment and to sit beside the Judge of heaven and earth, to condemn the unbelieving generation, is a fruit of the ministration of the risen Prince of life, Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

Now there is also a feigned submission of the ungodly. But when we read the Scriptures accurately, the Ninevites did not feign repentance, but on the contrary, their repentance was genuine. This is brought out even more clearly when the preaching of Jonah reaches the king of Nineveh. This is such a beautiful story to me because it reveals the work of God so clearly and purely. For it says: *"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"*, verse 6.

When God comes into the life of man two things usually happen, as we see in the king of Nineveh. Firstly man is dethroned and secondly man is humbled before God in sackcloth and ashes. He confesses and bewails his sins because he knows he has sinned against a merciful God. True repentance is actually a fruit of grace because of the realization of having sinned against a gracious God, like Peter did in denying his Master, for it says, *"And Peter went out and wept bitterly"*, Luke 22:62.

When God comes into your life you easily take off your fancy clothes and you go in mourning because of the oppression of the enemy, namely the burden of sin.

Now you should not think that I make black clothing an absolute duty as a fruit of true conversion, but man's inner state will certainly be recognizable by the way he dresses. An elderly child of God once said to someone who opposed black clothes: "Son, I dress in black because you are living on without being converted."

I am also aware that in certain circles the blackest cloth is not black enough. They almost wear black hats in bed. And when they go on a visit they all wear black clothes worth some two thousand dollars. But this is nothing but humbug. I do not attach any value to this. But if it is a fruit

of true conversion as a mark of repentance because of sins committed against a merciful Being, I have respect for it. I myself also wear a black suit when I go to the House of God. I do not mind whether people think this ridiculous or not. If done from good motives it is an expression of respect and dignity for the service of God as a fruit of faith. For if you can partake of the Lord's Supper in white trousers, you show your inner state.

The apostle Paul says: *"But if any man seemeth to be contentious, we have no such custom, neither the churches of God"*, 1 Cor. 11:16.

On the other hand I do not think a young woman should look like an eighty-year-old woman because of her black stockings, bun, bonnet and shoes. Rebecca was decked with jewellery, but nevertheless she was a woman who feared the Lord. Just be normal and dress simply as a fruit of faith. Your attire will not save you. God tears off everything, for all things are naked and open unto the eyes of Him with Whom we have to do. If God comes into your life your fancy clothes will go automatically, and then you will stand naked before God.

Jonah's preaching resulted in the king of Nineveh automatically taking off his beautiful robe. Nobody told him to do so; it was a fruit of his faith in God, so that he covered himself with sackcloth and humbled himself in dust and ashes. But he did something more. He ordered every inhabitant of the city to humble himself before God, even the very animals, with fasting, mourning and wailing. What he did is also a genuine mark of true conversion, for this man could no longer keep silence about the sins of others. If God comes into your life you will also warn others. Your own need makes you understand the need of others.

Many people profess to be converted, but don't care about other people perishing. That is no fruit of true conversion. Then it is to be feared that one is satisfied with a legalistic conversion, sitting with a booklet in a corner. This life does not bear any fruit. The king of Nineveh thought of the salvation of his subjects. He even thought of the cattle of his subjects. His actions contrast violently with our present-day government. Thousands of babies are murdered in the womb. Old people receive an injection and are likewise murdered because one wants to provoke God and give free rein to the lusts of the flesh.

Where are the Jonahs who in the Name of God pronounce judgment to the government? Many theologians play at church. But when a preacher does not jump into the breach, he is not the mouth of God, but a weakling, like Eli.

You must not say that, writer.

No, I must not, you are right, but it is a miracle if it is otherwise. By God's grace there are even now true servants of God who preach the mind of the Spirit. Oh, that we would beseech the Lord for His Spirit so that God's servants would be filled with the Holy Spirit and preach the Word with all boldness.

The king of Nineveh appeared to be neither a dictator nor a weakling. He felt one with his people. A dictator usually does not care about a few thousand human lives. Often he exploits the people in gruesome way. But the king was even more concerned about his subjects than about himself. He did not say: "*Who can tell God will turn and repent, and turn away from His fierce anger, that I perish not.*" No, he said: "*That we perish not*", verse 9.

It is a wonderful thing when a prince does not seek to save himself in times of war, distress and death, but throws himself into the breaches and leads his subjects bravely.

This king cannot be reproached with the threat: "*Woe to thee, o land, when thy king is a child.*"

However, that threat also applies to the churches: "*Woe to thee, o churches, when thy preacher is a child.*"

If a preacher does not attend to his duty, for example in times of epidemics, wars, special needs, etc., in virtue of the office he holds, such a preacher is a coward and not worthy of his office.

Jonah was no coward, but a hero of the faith. He risked his life. He did not disobey the LORD because he was afraid of his life. You can read this in chapter one. Neither did Jonah jeopardize his life needlessly. He went at God's command. God was his Sender.

If God sends us we don't need to fear and we take a mandate with us. Every preacher is, as it were, a herald, who passes on the Word of the Lord. Such a herald can only preach to the glory of God through the ministry of the Spirit. Life does not lie in the powerful voice of the preacher, but in the ministry of the Spirit.

Jonah's preaching had such a powerful effect that at the king's command all the inhabitants of Nineveh humbled themselves in sackcloth and ashes and cried earnestly unto God for remission of their evil works. The king of Nineveh justified God.

Recently the rulers of the place of my residence sent me an answer to my letter against immoral advertising. They shifted the responsibility onto the Advertising Standards Council. We have sunk so far in our country that our rulers have turned into traitors of the constitutional rights of

morals and values according to the Word of God. With Pilate they wash their hands in innocence. But then the king of Nineveh will condemn these rulers in the great day of judgment and say "*Woe to thee, o land, when thy king is a child.*" The Judge of heaven and earth shall condemn them to the place where there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, if they do not turn away from their evil works. This applies to all rulers national, provincial and local.

May there be a wrestling of faith at the throne of grace whether it may please God to convert our nation, our government, the queen and her family. Who knows God will turn away from the fierceness of His anger.

The sins of our people and nation lead us to ruin. And then to remember the Lord blessed our country so abundantly in the past. How many times did not God deliver our country from the enemy in times of war? Judgment seems inevitable now. The sins of homosexuality, drug-abuse, abortion, euthanasia, and so on, are openly approved of. Sin is not sin any more. But then judgment cannot but be terrible. God has warned us several times, either by means of a terrorism attack at the World Trade Centre in New York. But no government does repent. And in the churches things are even worse. All kinds of sin, like the sins in Sodom, enter the church. Now we should not think we are any better, but we should bow under it, for we are under the same judgment, you and me too. Concerning this we need not point fingers. Do I have anything that provokes people to jealousy?

*"Both we and all our fathers, LORD,
have done the sins by Thee abhorred;
iniquity we have committed
and we have acted wickedly.
Yet often hast Thou us acquitted
though we did not remember Thee."*

If we can say this by experience, miracles will happen. For the LORD says: "*And if My people accept of the punishment of their iniquity, then will I remember My covenant*", Lev. 26:41b-42a.

Many people think that they should convince others of guilt and truth with Jehu's blind zeal, but if I truly experience that I have sinned, the mouth will be shut. Then I will fast and mourn and cry unto God with weeping and supplication.

"So the people of Nineveh believed God and proclaimed a fast", verse 5.

These people have not argued about whether they could give credit to Jonah's penitential sermon. No, their hearts were pierced. If God impresses His judgment in our hearts because of our towering guilt, we have nothing to say anymore and we forget it is time to eat.

I have never gone hungry for religion's sake. I am sure of myself and I have my religion endorsed by the minister.

So you have a minister's faith, but then you have never become a Ninevite before God and so you are totally ignorant of your wretched state. You base your salvation on the endorsement of a minister, but this does not count with God. God looks right through our vile hearts. He tries the hearts and reins. He brings a man to loathe himself. Do you know what we want by nature? To ignore misery. But the Ninevites were in the midst of it. I have hope for the Ninevites of our day. They are still unspoiled for dead orthodoxy. Now I am not going to gloss over sin, but we all stink of unrighteousness. We are no better, and we act no better. And if you act better in your own eyes you have never been washed from your filthiness. For the works God's people may practise follow them because they are a reward of grace. They are works of faith.

The Ninevites were walking on the broad way to hell as we all do by nature. The one goes this way in his iniquity, but most church-goers travel to hell decently and without worry. Ah, people, if you still live by what you do and by what you abstain from, judgment has already been passed on you, unless you turn away from your evil works.

The Ninevites turned away from their evil works after having believed God on His Word. If we do not believe God and do not justify Him in His judgments, we will never believe in Christ Who has carried away the judgment of His Church into the sea of eternal forgetfulness.

Do you know what becomes manifest when God comes into our lives? Eternity. In the way of conviction God draws the veil of eternity aside a little so that we can view of the terrors of eternal death, the eternal woe unto sins. Do you know what we are going to ask then: "*My soul, do you realize what your lot is? How will you appear before God justly?*"

During a recent lecture on theology the lecturer contended we no longer need to wrestle with this question with which Luther wrestled so much. For, according to him, Luther was still in the Roman Catholic heresy and we start from the Reformation. I told him that Christ teaches the opposite view in Luke 13:24: "*Strive to enter in at the straight gate.*" For by nature we all are Roman Catholics at

heart.

"But this text applies to the life of faith", was the answer.

The reader should convince himself by reading what the text says next. Here Christ handles the law for all who are lying at ease, like the foolish virgins. "*Woe to them that are at ease in Zion, and trust in the mountain of Samaria*", Amos 6:1.

When we are pricked in our hearts we are no longer at ease. Then it becomes an absolute impossibility on our part. Eternity enters time and man stops arguing and reasoning.

Those Ninevites did not reason any more. They saw judgment written on all the houses in Nineveh: "*Mene, mene, tekel, upharsin*", Dan. 5:25. All the fathers cried out: "Mother, mother, children, children, we must soon appear before the Judge of heaven and earth."

If this becomes true in your life you clear your place of your television and all other wicked garbage and you bewail your fallen state with godly sorrow which works repentance to salvation, whether God be gracious or not.

"*Who knows...*", the king of Nineveh said. God goes on till you have lost all human hope. The king did not say: "Subjects, if only we show repentance God will surely avert judgment." No, he said: "*Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from His fierce anger, that we perish not*", verse 9.

In fact he said: "People, just listen, it is already a lost cause, but we cannot live in sin any longer. And if we have forty more days to live, we shall honour Him, even though we will perish for ever. *Who can tell...* I do not know, neither do I count on it, but who can tell God is equal to the occasion, for I have heard that His Name is Counsellor."

What a wonderful confession this heathen king made. Many a Jew and many a church-goer could envy such a confession, for no man ever gives this honour to God by himself.

If a man knew beforehand he was going to be saved, he surely would be willing to be condemned. But we are already condemned, we are already lost. Out of man there is not any hope of salvation. There he is, past redemption and void of arguments before God. The Ninevites believed this. They believed they were in a state of total death and that Nineveh would be completely ruined. The fathers cried out to their wives: "Forty more days and then we must appear before God without being reconciled! Oh, woe to us that we have sinned."

Those people cried out to God for grace. This will have caused great anxiety. Nineveh resounded with people

lamenting and bewailing their sins. Thousands of throats cried themselves hoarse unto the God of all flesh. It must have been deafening, for Nineveh was a city with one hundred and thousand inhabitants. It took Jonah three days to walk from one side of the town to the other. For it says: "*Nineveh was an exceeding great city of three days' journey.*" Just imagine the volume of sound those thousands of crying Ninevites produced. It will have made the sky shake. And all at the preaching of one man. Not as a result of seventy sermons, but of *one* sermon.

The Ninevites put us to shame. For the majority of us spent almost half their lives in a pew and are still unconverted. We may have attended church for forty years now, so we have heard more than four thousand sermons and are still unconverted.

Jonah's sermon took even less than five minutes and thousands of heathen were converted. Do you know why? Firstly, God worked in it. Secondly, in those forty days the Ninevites saw God's infinite love. They received another forty days of grace. God could have swept them away from the earth at once. Although he was not aware of it Jonah also preached the Gospel: "*Yet forty days.*" These were the mediatorial forty days of Christ in the wilderness! This is Gospel, for Christ fasted mediatorially for forty days for the Ninevites. For you and me too?

Why do you enter into this so extensively?

Because presently the Ninevites will condemn our religious country on the day of the great settling of accounts because of its refusal to repent. We are made fat with fatness for the day of slaughter and we do not realize that God is coming to judge us.

Can't you write in a more evangelical way, writer?

Is this then no Gospel that one sermon results in the conversion of one hundred and twenty thousand heathen? I think this is the greatest revival of all times.

We hear everywhere about the need of a spiritual revival, but guilt is hardly mentioned. However, God never passes by guilt. This applies both to political and personal life. If we have never accepted judgment, we still live for our own account. Accepting judgment is a fruit of the willingness of Christ by the Holy Spirit. For Christ accepted judgment in stead of His people. That is the base of the last five words for verse ten!

The Ninevites accepted judgment. "*And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil ways, and God*

repented of the evil that He had said that He would do unto them, and He did it not", verse 10.

Writer, now I do not understand anything of it at all. Can God change that much as to adapt Himself to man?

No, He cannot. God is the immutable unchanging One. He had decreed this already from eternity. *And why?* To save Nineveh.

And God had said that Nineveh would be overthrown after forty days!

In chapter two I promised you to return to the distinction between the will of God's command and the will of God's decree. God's command is not always God's decree. We see that here in verse ten. Jonah already knew this, that is why he fled from the presence of the LORD. If Jonah had known for sure that in this matter God's command also embraced His decree, he certainly would not have fled. On the contrary, he would have obeyed at once and have gone to Nineveh. Then he would already have rejoiced in the destruction of Nineveh in advance. But God reveals Himself absolutely in His command. His justice demands this. God cannot resign His right.

Therefore no mortal being can look behind the scenes of God's decree, unless the Lord reveals this. Hence the absolute command to Jonah, especially for the Ninevites. It hit home with majesty. This also happens in the way of conversion. When the law comes in with its damning power nothing is left of us. The law crushes, but grace raises up. God's command concerning fallen man is absolute. God does not change it. "*In the day that thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die*", Gen. 2:17.

Neither does God change the first promise. God does not change when He acquits a sinner, condemned by the law to death, from guilt and punishment on the ground of the blood-ransom of His Son. For then God has executed sentence, not on the sinner, but on His Son.

God's command embraced judgment on Nineveh, but His decree did not. God never changes His decree. But He can indeed change His command on the ground of His decree. God is free to command what He likes, isn't He? He is also sovereign in His decree. Who can fathom God's wise conduct? We may think we can call God to account, but God acts according to the counsel of His everlasting will. He is not accountable to anyone. When this carries weight in our lives, we cry out like the psalmist:

*"O my God, Thy way is holy;
for Thy greatness we extol Thee.
What god is there, strong and great
like our God, so high in state?
For Thou art the God whose glory
makes the peoples bow before Thee.
Thy strong arm redeemed and freed
Jacob's sons and Joseph's seed."*

"And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way", verse 10. The Ninevites cried out: "Get thee hence, get thee hence....!" This is always the mark of grace. Grace does not make holy people, but makes us know experimentally against Whom we have sinned, against a holy and merciful Being. Then we are going to love God. Can we still continue to live in sin? Can you still partake of the Lord's Supper with your television or short hair? If you can, you still lack love of God. For love God hates the least sin. Then we hate the garment spotted by the flesh and most of all we hate our self. Then we become meek people, meek towards others. Then you do not say: "Neighbour, you must and you shall dispose of that television." But then you say in tears: "Neighbour, you have the television in your cupboard, but I have it in my heart." Then you don't say: "Neighbour, I am not allowed to watch television." But you say: "Neighbour, I cannot watch it anymore, because my television-existence is the cause of the crucifixion of Christ."

What kind of strange expression is this?

You can only experience this. I am not going to explain it. Why can God's people not bear the sight of a television any more? Because they have seen Jesus crowned with honour and glory. They have seen the Lamb of God Which has carried away the sins of their existence. How then could they continue to live in sin? Of course I could multiply the list.

So God's command concerning Nineveh was changed by God's decree. The LORD knew already from eternity that the Ninevites would repent at Jonah's preaching. God does not act after the fact. He knows all from eternity. He repented of the evil He had said He was going to do. This is quite something! God repented of what He had announced to Nineveh.

What does that mean?

The sovereignty of God. God acts freely and sovereignly and does not render an account of His deeds. God teaches

us that we cannot work with His decrees. God teaches us that we cannot work with election. The command is: "Repent!" This command comes to everybody. No one is excluded. It is wicked to say: "If I am not elected I will not be saved anyway."

The Ninevites did not say this, but they repented at Jonah's preaching. God looked down from heaven at the city of Nineveh and beheld His own work there. God is always glorified in His own works and extremely glorified in the conversion of sinners. The Word of God says that there shall be joy in heaven over one sinner that repents, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which needs no repentance.

Can you imagine the joy there must have been in heaven over the thousands of Ninevites who turned to the living God? We are living in a time in which very little true conversion is found. God is not to blame for this, but this is because of our damnable unbelief. People do not rejoice any more with those that rejoice and do not weep any more with those that weep. We cling to each other like loose grains of sand. If we despise or suspect the work of God He will hide His Face or smite the mockers with blindness, as He did with the Sodomites. I sometimes think that the Lord will forsake our country for a time because we trifle with sins, even though there still is a people that do or will be brought to fear the Lord in truth. But then there is still our national guilt. The wickedness of our country has come up before the Lord. There are so many church-meetings even in the most orthodox circles. There is no or hardly any warning against sin and iniquity, because one's position is at stake. There are those who for the outside world call themselves brothers, but in practice they are not even second cousins. There is more slandering of each other in the church than in the world. The tender fellowship with God is lacking everywhere. With a bit of sentimentality people try to glue and keep together that which can be kept together. We are living in days of satanic tolerance as to the sins in the church.

God never tolerates sins, not even the sins of the Ninevites. Would He then tolerate the sins of our country? With many woes the wicked are afflicted. Judgment seems inevitable. We have sinned the cup full. Who weeps for it? The heathen from Nineveh!

I know one more: Jeremiah. *"Oh, that my head were waters, and my eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people"*, Jer. 9:1.

I know Another One: Christ. *"Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto desolate"*, Matth. 23:37-38.

If a people repents it is attended with the Lord's blessing. Listen: *"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"*, verse 10. For both are God's work.

The Ninevites did not argue that on the ground of their conversion the LORD should avert judgment. It was a great miracle for them that the LORD did not execute judgment.

There is a people on earth who think themselves worthy of deserving judgment. They will approve of the wages of sin. They do not fight and do not plead any more. They agree with God. They will justify God and expect well-deserved punishment. That happens in the twinkling of an eye. They are heading for hell and they see the gate already open. Sentence has already been passed and will soon be carried out. *"And He did it not."*

They sink with a cry, for to be without God is worse than hell. *"And He did it not."* But he **did** do it, not on His people but on His Son. God will provide Himself a Lamb for a burnt offering. When Isaac saw Abraham's knife descending, God averted it. The knife did not touch Isaac, but the little ram that was behind Abraham. This points to Christ. The sword of divine justice was received by the Lamb. Christ stepped into the breach when the sword of divine vengeance descended on the Church and willingly received the sword with His soul and body. Then the universe resounded with: *"It is finished!"* And He did it not, for it is finished. The ransom has been paid. Do you know you only discover this by personal experience? It is all down to experience. Otherwise a man may tell exactly how it should happen, but he is a stranger to the way in which it is done.

Beloved reader, do you know experientially that the sword of vengeance has been averted from you?

Christ allowed His hands and feet to be nailed through to satisfy His Father, to quench the wrath at sin and to engrave His people upon the palms of His hands by engraving the scars of the nails in His hands. Then Christ turned to His Father and cried out: "Father, behold the scars in My hands, feet and side, as a hall-mark and seal of the covenant between Thee and Me. I have engraved My people in the palms of My hands. Behold here I and the children which

Thou hast given Me, they are Thine."

The will of command is: *"The soul that sinneth, it shall die."* The will of God's decree is, people of the Lord: *"Come, ye blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world"*, Matth. 25:34.

The Ninevites believed Jonah's preaching and expected the destruction of Nineveh, but "He did it not." The Sodomites did not believe Lot's warning and did not expect the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, but He **did** do it! The people in Noah's day did not believe his preaching and did not expect the flood, but He **did** do it.

Do you know what the miracle was for the Ninevites? That God sent the prophet Jonah to warn them. And Jonah's preaching struck home, for they believed God and turned from their evil works. They threw all television-sets into the Euphrates and Tigris. They closed all the public houses and the brothels were set on fire. The homosexuals climbed the walls of Nineveh with the rope of self-condemnation round their necks. By faith they gave the ends into God's hands and left the outcome to Him expecting well-deserved punishment. *"And He did it not."*

The abortion-clinics were boarded up and the abortionists were sentenced to death. The churches were emptied and because of the crowd Jonah could not mount the pulpit and continued preaching in the streets: *"Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown."*

Within forty days the ecclesiastical offices were restored and the office-bearers were tested as to faith and calling. Within forty days the reformation in Nineveh was a fact and idolatry had been banned. Within forty days all the discotheques had been closed. Within forty days all drugs were strictly forbidden and the drug-traffickers had been driven out of the city. Within forty days all the bakeries were closed and a fast was proclaimed for man and animal.

Within forty days all Nineveh had repented, for Jonah went and told in palaces, churches, highways and hedges that Nineveh would be destroyed. And our religious country sleeps on, the wise with the foolish, apart from some faithful watchmen. What will the last preaching be? *"Behold, the Bridegroom cometh, go ye but to meet Him"*, Math. 25:6.

Beloved reader, if only I could burn the solemnity of this story into your heart! We are journeying towards eternity. God requires us to turn unconditionally to Him and to faith in Christ. Most important in our lives is God's command, what God has revealed to us in His Word, saying: *"The time is fulfilled and the Kingdom of God is at hand, repent ye and believe the Gospel"*, Mark 1:15.

Have we already reached a stalemate with this divine command? Or can we still get away with God's command? Do you know when we reach a stalemate with God's decree? When we put our hand into our bosom, as Moses did, when we take it out it is also leprous. Then you do not point to others any more, because you have done it. Then you are the chief of sinners, the worst and most obstinate sinner. What an eternal miracle it will be when God's command -*and He did it not*- applies to us personally. God's people will eternally wonder at God's decree. Why me, why me, since others whom Thou do not grant mercy will perish?

Jonah will have been extremely joyful that God was so gracious to the Ninevites, will he not?

Nothing of the kind, it displeased him exceedingly so that he was very angry! Jonah would rather have sent all the Ninevites to hell. Yes, friends, sometimes God's servants are more ready to judge than God. James and John were apparently more righteous than Christ. For when the Lord Jesus joined them on their way through Samaria, the Samaritans did not put them up. Luke 9 verses 53-55 says: "*And they did not receive Him, because His face was as though He would go to Jerusalem. And when His disciples James and John saw this, they said, Lord, wilt Thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elias did? But He turned and rebuked them and said, Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of.*"

Jonah, you do not know what manner of spirit you are of!

Now we should not look down on Jonah, for this lives in the hearts of all of us. We do not bother about everybody going to hell, for their fate is of no concern to us. Neither are we moved with compassion. But on the other hand I meet many people who do pretend to pity other people by commending a 'Gospel' that is not a Gospel for lost sinners. Fortunately Christ is moved with the fate of sinners' souls, otherwise none would be saved.

"I have trodden the winepress alone, and of the people there was none with me", Is. 63:6.

No eye pitied you till He passed by and saw you polluted in your blood. Christ knows what hell is, that is why He weeps for Jerusalem. Jonah does not weep for Nineveh, no, he clenches his fists towards heaven because God is good to heathen.

Jonah, Jonah, are you a soldier of the most High?

"Yes, I am, but I cannot bear that God does not destroy Nineveh. I cannot bear that God does not throw those heathen into hell", Jonah says.

Jonah, you do not know what manner of spirit you are of.

For God acts without respect of persons. Jonah seems more just than God, but God is more merciful than Jonah. God would undoubtedly have destroyed Nineveh if the people had not repented. But He didn't. Why not? His counsel shall stand. His decree concerning Nineveh was concluded in His everlasting counsel. What was that? That He would spare Nineveh. I am not saying that Nineveh was not destroyed in later times. We can read about this in Nahum. But now we are talking about the Nineveh in Jonah's days, in the day of the reign of Jeroboam II over Israel. So God's counsel is unchangeable.

That is a comfort, people of God, that God's decrees are unchangeable, immutable, otherwise you could sin yourselves out of them. But you never can. When God's people look at themselves they indeed can. Therefore it is an afflicted and poor people in themselves. They are so poor that they trust in the Name of the Lord. "*The blessing of the Lord, it maketh rich, and He addeth no sorrow with it*", Prov. 10:22.

Jonah could never sin himself out of it, although his path went right through the Mediterranean. Nevertheless he was able to sing: "*We enter heaven and inherit kingdoms.*"

We shall conclude chapter three. But we are not finished with Jonah yet. We shall join him under the gourd for a moment to learn Who God is to His people, and what God's people are to God. Jonah had withdrawn and gone outside the city and observed with regret how the Ninevites repented. The LORD employs the most unwilling instrument in His service to extend His Kingdom. Nowadays Jonah would not be sent any more. Willing people are sought for the missionary work, suitable people, educated people, people with a heart for missions. Being converted and called by God seems no longer important nowadays.

"A higher vocational training and a little sense of how to draw up a mission-report, that will do", most missionary-committees say nowadays. But Jonah knew he had been called and sent by God. He was the mouth of God and he spoke what the LORD spoke to Him. He did not even have to think about what he was going to preach. He only needed to repeat what the Spirit had said to him. And the result was a great awakening. Judgment was averted. For: "*He did it not.*"

Do we know this from experience?

4. JONAH'S GOURD

In the previous chapter we have seen that God averted judgment on Nineveh. God's command was turned into God's decree. For it says: "*And He did it not*", *Jonah 3:10*.

"*But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was very angry*", *verse 1*.

Jonah was angry with everybody. He was angry with the Ninevites, but also with God. He could not bear it that Nineveh was not razed to the ground.

Maybe you point at Jonah: "Jonah, you are a murderer." But if one finger points at Jonah, the other fingers also point to a murderer. You and I are murderers as well. A man does not become a murderer because he murders somebody, but he **is** a murderer and that is why he murders his neighbour. We are murderers from the beginning. It is a miracle if we are kept from committing one. Jonah was also kept from it. But in his heart the prophet had committed more than a hundred and twenty thousand murders. One hundred and twenty thousand Ninevites were listed on Jonah's death-roll. Jonah, the prophet, was angry with God. He burnt with anger because God did not destroy that wicked city, but instead turned judgment away. Jonah thought: "Now the LORD can destroy this wicked mess at one blow."

"*And He did it not*."

"It is maddening", Jonah must have thought. And he got very angry. But who would say to his Maker: "What doest Thou?"

Before you condemn Jonah you must allow me to first explain for his anger a little more. If people are angry with each other they usually do not want to see or speak to each other any more. You might think that Jonah did not ever want to have anything to do with God. But not so with Jonah. Jonah's anger was not projected at the Person of God, but at His dealings. That is also sin, but different.

By nature every man bears malice against the Person of God and that accounts for our state of death. We are at enmity with our Creator. Jonah was not. He was not at enmity with his Father in heaven. But he was angry because God was so merciful to the Ninevites, while God's law demanded the destruction of all Nineveh.

Jonah was not so much a preacher of the Gospel, but a preacher of the law. He was a brother of Moses. Moses and

Jonah were upholders of the law. Jonah demanded that the LORD maintain the requirement of the law according to His own Word. Jonah did not want to have anything to do with mercy. He would not be relented. All Nineveh had to be destroyed according to the requirement of the law. Period!

So Jonah's anger was not unfounded, but without mercy. His anger was not to be justified, but it was understandable. He argued: "God transgresses His own law, but I shall uphold that law." Therefore he could not agree with God's mercy although he knew from experience that God was very merciful and gracious in Christ. But he had forgotten his own origin so that he got angry with the Ninevites.

People of God, if we forget our origin, we will play the harlot with our first husband, Moses. Then we are not driven by the love of the second Adam, Christ, but by the zeal of the law. Then we have more fire than light. Here Jonah had more fire than light, not with his preaching but on the result of his preaching. But then we read something beyond our comprehension.

"*And he prayed...*"

It is hard to understand that Jonah should fold his hands and bend his knees in this condition, isn't it?

It is, but listen to what he prayed. Jonah wanted to lecture God even in his prayer.

"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", verses 2-3.

Jonah portrays man, also after grace is received. Do you know what Jonah did? He began to excuse himself by glossing over his disobedience.

A man is awfully slow of understanding. So are God's people. Fake religion is not. The rich young man had never objected against God's decree, for this good young man could abide by the law. But when Christ wanted him to sell all his possessions, a viper emerged from his heart. Not a poisonous one, it is true, but a weeping viper. The devil weeps for sorrow when Christ says that this earth passes away and the lust thereof. For the moment this world passes away the devil cannot tempt one more person. That is why he is in such a hurry to tempt as many souls as possible and to drag them to perdition. But the devil always works after the facts.

Dear friends, the devil will surely have wept most loudly when the Ninevites turned to the living God. The devil will surely have outcried the Ninevites when they cried to God. Jonah also had such a roaring devil in his heart. Yes, you should not think too highly of God's servants, for when you hit a man in the flesh, it is like trampling on the devil's tail.

Is it really that bad, writer?

It is even worse than we think. Pray much for discovering light and you will automatically meet the devil within. And when you have discovered this devil, pray for covering light.

Jonah did not say: "LORD, it is good for me to have been afflicted." No, he now began to defend his flight from the presence of the LORD. He began to gloss over his disobedience.

Say, Jonah, in the belly of the fish you were brought back on your way right through the depths of the Mediterranean and are you now going to gloss over your flight?

"Yes", Jonah would say, "I have always thought things would go wrong and that is why I fled away, for the Gospel is too broad. I have not been brought up like that. I have been brought up in the law and I could wish fire to come down from heaven so that all Nineveh would be destroyed." Jonah is going to make complaints to God.

"Therefore now, o LORD, take, I beseech Thee, my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live", verse 3.

Unlike Elijah, Jonah is tired of life because God converted people. Elijah was tired of life because he thought there were no more converted people. But in the case of Jonah it concerned heathen. And salvation was of the Jews. If God had converted so many Jews, Jonah would have danced with soul's delight. He was a Jew in heart and soul. He cursed these Ninevites in his heart. He would rather die than behold God's mercy unto Nineveh for even one minute.

He prayed: *"LORD, You'd better take me now, for I cannot bear the sight of it any longer."*

If, at that moment, Jonah would have had the disposal of an atomic bomb, he would have pressed the button immediately. If, at that moment, he would have been a general in the army, he would instantly have commanded all jet-fighter pilots to bomb Nineveh level to the ground. He would have done anything to raze Nineveh to the ground. Jonah did not want to have anything to do with mercy. He wanted to uphold the law. Jonah and Moses are brothers upholding the divine demand: *"In the day that thou eatest*

thereof, thou shalt surely die", Gen. 2:17. Jonah would not hear of a forgiving God for the enemies of his people.

But now God is a God Who reconciles enemies to Himself and Jonah admitted this in his prayer to God. In his prayer he proclaimed Christ's all-sufficiency for the vilest of sinners. He said: *"For I knew that Thou art a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repitest Thee of the evil"*, verse 2.

What Jonah prayed he had experienced himself. He knew this from experience. He prayed: *"For I knew..."* He knew this from his own experience. He had learned this in his personal conversion to God, and again in the belly of the fish. Then God had proved to be the Same to him. God was not a Judge for Jonah, but a Father. And a father does not punish like a judge. A father always shows his grace again towards his children. He never punishes and afflicts because he delights in it. God's chastisements for His people are always of a pedagogic nature. Then great trials are at times necessary to know Who God is and who we are ourselves. For God is a God of glory. He is a jealous God of His honour. He bestows grace, first and foremost to His glory, which involves salvation. When does God bestow grace, reader?

When I repent my sins.

No! God does not bestow grace when we show remorse, but when **He** repents of the evil He has said He will do. God is always the First!

But don't you have to show repentance then?

No, not at all, anyway not the way you think you must. Repenting of sins is a fruit of grace, but not a condition or means of payment to obtain grace!

When God sees a sinner in Christ, He repents of the sentence of the law on the sinner. *"And He did it not."* This does not imply that God condones sin. For He did execute the sentence of the law on His Son. This is the heart of experience. When this is applied in the hour of love, God pardons the sinner from guilt and punishment on the ground of the accomplished righteousness of Christ. When God sees blood on the doorposts of our hearts, He, to speak with all reverence, repents of the sentence to which the sinner is subjected according to the demand of the law. *"And He did it not."* He did do it on His Son. This must be experienced, for otherwise we only brag about experience. Your pockets may be filled with texts and experiences, but if you lack experience you still live for your own account.

Your sweet affections and sympathy towards God and His service are at root only hidden enmity against sovereign grace if you lack the necessary experience of the remission of sins. There may very well be a promise, but then it is necessary for you to find out if that promise is also anchored in God's decree. Imagine that you think you have received a promise from God, but that of its fulfilment it must be said: "And He did it not." What a disillusionment that would be.

Can God then break His Word?

No, He cannot, never! But the point is that we know for sure that God has spoken to us. Otherwise the promise becomes some sort of gourd which quickly withers. For it to be well for time and eternity, the God of the promise must be our Portion. Oh, friends, examine yourselves whether you lean on the promise without being assured that the Promiser knows you.

"Gather yourselves together, yea, gather together, o nation not desired: before the decree bring forth, before the day pass as the chaff, before the fierce anger of the LORD come upon you, before the day of the LORD's anger come upon you", Zeph. 2:1-2.

You may be glad of the gourd, for example, that the spirits are subject to you; but the Lord Jesus says: "*Notwithstanding in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subjected unto you; but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven*", Luke 10:20.

Are our names written in heaven?

Well, Jonah could say both, but he did not do it. He did not rejoice at all that the spirits were subjected to him. He was morose. He opposed God's counsel. This is always very dangerous, for His decree on Nineveh was appointed from eternity. But the execution of His command over Nineveh was not appointed in His counsel as the decree was. Therefore a man cannot work with God's decree. For His decrees are unchangeable. Every man is subject to His command, for the will of God's command comes unconditionally to everybody to convince fallen mankind of its responsibility. We are one hundred percent responsible for our words, deeds and thoughts. We are also one hundred percent responsible for our original guilt.

Now you may assent to this, but by nature no one agrees with this holy demand of God. That is only learnt at Jesus' school. When a man is brought to agree with the demand of the law, it is a fruit of Christ's accomplished work in him. Christ was ahead of His Church for an eternity. In the

counsel of peace Christ became Surety. Then eternity resounded with the words out of the mouth of the Father: "*For who is this that engaged his heart to approach unto Me? saith the LORD*", Jer. 30:21b.

Then the Son answered: "*Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of Me, I delight to do Thy will, o My God; yea, Thy law is within My heart*", Ps. 40:7-8.

All the children of God will understand something of the fact that it is not them, but God Who is the First. Christ teaches His people to bow by His bowing. Christ teaches His Church to pray by His praying. Christ teaches His children to forgive by His reconciliation. Christ teaches His disciples to testify by His testimony. This is only learnt at Jesus' school. At this school one grows in ignorance, like the apostle testifies: "*For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified*", 1 Cor. 2:2.

Jonah had also attended this school, but he wanted to preserve salvation for his people alone and not for those wicked Ninevites. Jonah did not want to share the school-desk with such a wicked Ninevite. He downright did not want any heathen in the church, for the church was not for heathen, but for Jews. Jonah had a sectarian tendency. He wanted a church with the door closed to the world whereas the church owes an open door to the world. As to this he would have felt very at home with the Labadists and Baptists. In this state of spiritual pride God still bore with him. The LORD kissed His child and like a father gently asked if his anger was just: "*Dost thou well to be angry?*" verse 4.

God's goodness to His servant is beyond our comprehension. This goodness of God to Nineveh surpassed Jonah's forbearance. It was too painful for him. Jonah did not understand God. Neither did Asaph, until he went into the sanctuary of God. Then Asaph saw a Lamb, standing as if It had been slain. A Lamb Which was wounded in the house of His friends. Then Asaph became a beast before God. Then he became who he was, the greatest of sinners. For in the sanctuary he saw the Lord Jesus standing in his place.

This also applied to Jonah, although here he was very much against the grain. Those whose sins God forgives, are His forever, yes, already from everlasting. But in the standing of spiritual life Jonah was anything but what he should be. For in the right standing of spiritual life, will, mind and affections are swallowed in the will and love of God in Christ. True saving faith wants what God wants. True faith does not look at the circumstances, but looks unto God. Faith clings to Christ, the Object of faith.

Faith works through love.

Well, this does not apply to Jonah here. His faith did not work by love. He did have faith, only at that moment he lacked love. True faith can only turn by the wheel of love. With Jonah this wheel of love had run stuck. He had left the city on the east side and sat down in a field, probably on a hill, to see what would happen to the city. He hoped with all his heart that the Ninevites would not persist in their turning to God. Then God would still destroy the city. But that hope vanished, for the conversion of the Ninevites was genuine because God was the Author of it. In the end Jonah lost all hope that the city would be destroyed. Realizing this he lost his will to live. His heart was so filled with anger and sorrow that he did not want to live any longer.

Jonah prayed and besought God to take his soul from him, but the LORD did not hear His servant. God did not hear Jonah, but He did hear the Ninevites. How is that? "*Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in His Name, He will give it you*", John 16:23.

Jonah did not pray in the Name of Christ, but in his own name. And such prayers cannot please God. Maybe you have prayed all your life and have never yet received an answer. Then you have never prayed in the Name of Christ. Many prayers are said, but to pray in the Name of Christ is only sovereign grace.

*"God led them forth with joy and singing,
their voices with His praises ringing.
He gave to them the nation's land,
filled with their fruit His people's hand,
that they might serve Him all their days,
O Israel, to the LORD give praise."*

But Jonah is also a child of God, isn't he?

He certainly is, but the prayer Jonah is praying here can never be heard because it is against the will of God's decree. If we want to be heard we must pray according to God's will.

How do I know I pray according to God's will?

If through grace you are enabled to pray in the Name of Christ, you pray according to God's will. But this is a mystery. For then you must listen and wait for God to speak. "*My mouth to you great wisdom will impart, for thoughtful and discerning is my heart. My ear now to a parable inclining, I with the harp will show my riddle's meaning*", Ps. 49:1.

This people wait for Him to speak, even though it concerns His anger.

There are many people who do not mind Jesus suffering the wrath of God. But they have never been willing to bear the wrath of God themselves. "Christ died for sinners", these people say, "so also for me." But they have never been dead with Him. This is nothing but a religion of speculation. If you have not been dead with Christ you cannot possibly pray in His Name.

How can I learn to do that?

You cannot learn this, but you have to receive it by grace through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. But the Holy Spirit can only make His abode in a soul if we are dead to the first man, Moses. Then it is no longer necessary for a man, to know, to be or to be able to do something, because Christ Who has trodden the winepress alone did everything! A man can do nothing to change God.

Many people pray for grace to prevail upon God. But we cannot prevail upon God, we must be prevailed upon, also in prayer. True praying is praying in spirit and in truth. "*Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities, for we know not what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Itself maketh intercession for us with groanings, which cannot be uttered. And He That searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit because He maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God*", Rom. 8:26-27.

When Jonah was meanwhile chafing with sorrow because Nineveh was not destroyed, the LORD provided a gourd to relieve his sorrow, so that he would find some refreshment in the shade of the tree.

Sometimes God deals with His people and servants in a most remarkable way. The LORD could as well have commanded Jonah to return to Canaan, but He wanted to give His servant further instructions. Therefore He provided a gourd. Why? To teach Jonah concerning His sovereign dealings with Nineveh!

The gourd shot up in one day and grew up into a full-grown tree. And its shade was sweet to Jonah. It says: "*Jonah was exceedingly glad of the gourd.*" In fact Jonah was happy with nothing. He did not rejoice in God, but in the early dew that would soon pass away.

I have already talked about Jonah's spiritual pride. In this spiritual standing God's people cannot distinguish between shadow and substance. Then they are usually glad with nothing. Then they do not lay their hands on what it is, but on what it is not.

Jonah was happy with something ephemeral, but not with the salvation of over a hundred and twenty thousand souls.

While Jonah persisted in his dissatisfaction with Nineveh, the LORD in His adorable providence provided a gourd to shelter Jonah from the glaring sun. Even if God's children go against the grain, God upholds them nevertheless. *"For if we believe not, yet He abideth faithful; He cannot deny Himself."*

God knows the frame of His children and remembers that we are dust. But God can lead the world into such extremities that His people have to stoop under the world to avert judgment. We saw this when Jonah was on the ship that threatened to break in the storm. Then Jonah was in the right state before God and man, for he became the guilty one. But here he was far from his place. But God dealt with His refractory child as a tender Father. Jonah lived on God's providence. First God provided a fish and now God provided a gourd.

Many people are insured up to their necks, but Jonah had his insurance in heaven! O, where is that people who live out of the Lord's hand? I am sure they exist. But I meet people who speak a high spiritual language and who can tell you exactly what faith is and how God converts His people, but do not confront them with Lord's Day 10 of the Heidelberg Catechism, for then they sham deafness and are speechless.

Beloved reader, I do not know your state, but don't you want to venture with this God of complete salvation both for time and eternity? Many people speak of a great faith, but nothing ever happens. These people have a little God. But Luther says: "Faith is a restless thing, something is always happening." God's people mostly have little faith, but a great God, a God both for time and eternity.

If your life is hidden with Christ in God, God takes care of your whole life, yes, forever and ever. If God in Christ has taken your soul for His account, He takes your all and He takes you as you are. Then He also takes your mistakes and your unwillingness for His account. God's people live gratuitously on God's providence, on the ground of Christ's merits. They have free room and board, for God provides food, clothes and fellowship. Those are the rights of God. And he who is not lax in spiritual matters can depend on His faithful care.

Self-willed-religion does not accept this. It must take care of itself. People are always busy with nought and nothing. "Yes", they say, "we also have our responsibility."

May I ask what has become of our so-called responsibility? True enough. The Lord will judge us according to our responsibility in the state of innocence. But what has become of our so-called responsibility? Already in Paradise we sinned ourselves to death. But a man without grace wants to do something, doesn't he? He begins to work with his responsibility. He polishes himself, he has nothing but good things. But his speech betrays him. You immediately hear whether a man relies upon his self-righteousness or on the righteousness of Christ. Who leans on his self-righteousness has both good and bad. But Jonah had nothing but bad. And his God taught him. Jonah could never sin himself out of salvation, for his name was written in the Lamb's Book of Life. Jonah was right against the grain, but the LORD bore with His child. God's dearest children are usually the mangiest sheep, always going against the grain. The religion of most people is one of patching yourself up. "Do these good thing and avoid those bad thing." These people have never gone astray, but they have always been able to keep on the right path. But Jonah only had one path, away from God. Jonah was like a ship without a rudder which went all directions except the right one.

I once heard a man say: "By nature a man is in the ship of his life with one oar. But when God comes into his life, he gets another one."

Yes, this is precisely the language of so-called religious people. They live on self-redemption. They row and row to save themselves. But, friends, when God comes into your life the Lord causes that little boat to roll in such a way that you lose that one oar as well and get overboard with Jonah. God only saves drowning people. Do you know this by experience? Or are you a stranger in Jerusalem and do not know these things? Has it never been revealed to you that your gourd is one of self-willed religion?

Despite his wrongs God gave Jonah the privilege of resting under a passing shadow. But, friends, that never lasts long. God does not spoil His children on the way to the heavenly Jerusalem. But, to speak with all reverence, in Christ God cannot help spoiling His children because He loves them so dearly. The Lord is always closest to His blackest sheep. Christ is also loved most by the mangiest sheep. The LORD loved Jonah, His child and servant so much that He spoiled him a bit. God could likewise have punished him severely because of his behaviour. But the LORD took, as it were, His rebellious servant on His lap and spoiled and refreshed him.

"Is Ephraim My dear son? Is he a pleasant child? For since

I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still: therefore My bowels are troubled for him, I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the LORD", Jer. 31:20. That is how God thinks about His children, also when they are right against the grain. God's faithfulness shines like the rainbow of His covenant of grace. Jonah has been singing about this for some thousand years now: "*Through Thee, through Thee alone because of Thy everlasting good pleasure.*"

Jonah's anger was quenched for a moment by the gourd, but he forgot the God of the miracle. Jonah did not set his heart on his Creator, but on creation, the gourd. But, to speak with all reverence, the Lord knows how to deal with this, doesn't He? For He provided a worm to gnaw through the roots of the gourd.

"Behold, that which I have built will I break down, and that which I have planted I will pluck up, even this whole land", Jer. 45:4.

If you set your heart on material things, people of God, God will provide a mole to plough up your garden.

I once heard of a woman who had set her heart on a picture she had made. While she was looking at her painting it dropped on the floor and broke to pieces. God's people must lose their Josephs and Benjamins to learn to depend on God. Then your idolatrous love of creature will wither, even though it may be your own child.

If a congregation idolizes a minister God will allow him to fall into sin or remove him. Then such a minister resembles Jonah's withered gourd.

I heard about a minister who had set his heart on money. When one day he had drawn money from the bank God dealt with him. A man came up to him, put a knife to his throat and extorted his money from him. That was the hand of God. Love of money is the root of all evil. This is the sin in orthodox reformed circles. As far as this is concerned, Laban, the miser, is still very much alive.

Jonah, like Elijah, lived out of God's hand. He lived on the interest of the heavenly salary. Jonah did not live on the spoil. He did not live on the wealth of the Ninevites, but on divine care and providence. If Jonah had asked for an elaborate meal he would, I think, certainly have gotten it. But as to this he was just like Abraham who did not wish to receive anything from the king of Sodom because he had lifted up his hand to heaven and he lived on what the LORD gave him. How many church-goers in our days have lifted up their hands to the molten insurance-calf?

Oh, if our country does not turn to God like the Ninevites did, the destruction will be complete.

So Jonah was sitting under the gourd and lay down to spend the night under the sheltering leaves. We do not read he had thanked the LORD for the miraculous tree. Jonah forgot God, the God of life Who had performed so many miracles. If we do not recognize God in the miracle, it will wither, at least if we fear the Lord. Just look at Jonah.

"But God prepared a worm, when the morning rose the next day, and it smote the gourd that it withered", verse 7.

Man proposes, but God disposes. Jonah proposes, but God provides a worm. When Jonah awoke he was lying on a bed of withered leaves, for it is written that God provided a worm when the sun rose. So that was early in the morning while Jonah was still asleep. When he awoke he did not look up at the roof of leaves, but against the bare branches of the withered gourd. The gourd is also a picture of the sham conversion of hypocrites. These people are converted when they breathe a sigh and shed a tear. But when God converts His people it takes a whole life before they have lost every ground they rest on. God's people need a whole life to learn Who God is and who they are themselves.

What moved God to save such obstinate sinners like Jonah? Like you and me? Now we can begin to analyse Jonah, but who am I before God? Do you know by experience you have corrupted your way? Our mouths are quite ready to talk about things which do not live in our hearts.

Writing about Jonah, no problem, but being Jonah by experience...! Oh, beloved friends, when I think about this I could wish I had never written one letter. But when for the umpteenth time I wanted to stop and forget all about it, it more than once happened that the Lord gave me such a testimony in my soul that I could not but do it. Then God made me say: *"What I have written, I have written. My heart is inditing a good matter: I speak of the things which I have made touching the King: my tongue is the pen of a ready writer"*, Ps. 45:1, although I have not written about one subject which is not worthy of hell and always needs to be washed in the blood of Christ. "I am but a little piece of chalk in God's hands", a minister once said. That is true. It is a miracle if this is so, for then I do not count. Then it is no longer necessary, it is no longer possible and I no longer want it. But usually man wants to carry some weight. Then one is happy with oneself. Jonah was also happy with nothing. It was but a gourd. It was only the early dew that quickly passed away. Jonah had forgotten God. He was glad of the gourd, but he did not rejoice in God. He lived far away from communion with God. His heart was hardened. I must

say that if God's true servants can do without communion with God, they become legalistic or free-will zealots. Then they become hard men who do not want anybody to be saved, except themselves. Jonah did not want the Ninevites to be saved either, but he was happy with a gourd from which he profited himself. If only he was all right... But then the LORD will cause your gourd to wither, Jonah.

We are living in a hard society because the ministry of reconciliation is lacking in church and state everywhere. Then people become lovers of self and unfeeling towards others. The love of many shall wax cold. We are living in the middle of a loveless society. Mothers allow their own children to be broken into pieces by abortionists. Why? Because they lack love themselves. And people without love eventually become brutes. Hitler has justly been reproached with being a mass-murderer. But our own rulers have become mass-murderers because they pass bills which make it possible for living babies to be cold-bloodedly broken into pieces in the womb. And when the elderly become a burden on society they are murdered with an injection.

I am afraid God will visit our government and country with His judgment. Praying does not seem to avert it. Our country has become an abyss of the sins which were committed in Sodom. It has become a den of murderers. But there is something much deeper at the root than many a man thinks. *"For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God, and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the Gospel of God?"* 1 Pet. 4:17.

So judgment begins at the House of God, at the people of God. Now we may well say that Jonah was far from his place, but if we think we have our house in order, we are blind to reality and lack discernment.

Orthodox reformed or antinomian, we are all included in the same judgment. Have we ever been brought to embrace this judgment?

However, God does not suffer Himself to be stopped by the sins of nation and people. Or do you think we could limit God in His will and way? The Lord can move His candlestick somewhere else. When the Jewish people were living in idolatry, the Lord put the candlestick of His Word in the midst of Nineveh. Why? To put the covenant people to shame so that they would be provoked to jealousy. But that went right through judgment. The idolatry of the Jews resulted in an exile of seventy years.

Writer, you were going to talk about Jonah's gourd.

I have already talked about Jonah's gourd, but I can tell you something about another one. What do you think about the miraculous false united churches that agree with Rome and Sodom? They all have one thing, namely policy of divide and rule. Do you know what the Lord Jesus says concerning this matter? *"Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand"*, Matth. 12:25.

You see, the Lord Jesus speaks a clear language and it needs no more explanation. Let it be a warning for us that any human church-unification leads to the death. Many church-goers are weeping about the heap of the church ruins, but we have to become dust. The Lord will raise the cities of Judah out of the dust. This is biblical language. Enough of it, let us return to Jonah. Jonah was sitting under the gourd and he was exceedingly happy with that tree. Jonah took great offence at the repentance of the Ninevites, but the Lord used the gourd to break his anger. What does this mean?

When one takes offence at God's work, the Lord sends a spirit of error. For then one is happy with nothing and takes nothing for all and all for nothing. Jonah experienced this through his own guilt. For God provided a worm. When God's people are happy with nothing the worm will soon emerge. Then you may have quacked about your conversion all over the country, but you were not aware that the worms emerged already for the second time.

Jonah was such a highly converted Jew that he felt offended that God converted heathen. He will certainly have thought under the gourd: "That gourd is surely a pat on the back for my preaching."

But the next morning when he looked against the bare branches, he was offended and despondency and self-pity made him lie down. The sun beat upon his head so that he became breathless and cried out: *"It is better for me to die than to live."*

Along with Job, the prophet Jonah preferred to be strangled rather than to live. If he would have had a piece of rope he would have hanged himself on the withered gourd.

That is queer talk, writer, for the Lord guards His people against suicide!

Indeed He does. God guards His people. That does not mean they never reach for the rope.

I once heard of a man who because of judgment was close to despair. He worked at a feed mill-factory and in despair he jumped into a machine which likewise grounds

the feed. The moment he jumped into the machine which would have minced his body, it stopped. Then the everlasting love of God came into him and he was converted on the spot. God had no delight in his death, but in his conversion. Never follow his example though!

Do you know what I believe if Jonah had hanged himself on the tree? That the branch which Jonah had hanged himself on would have broken off. God guards His children. But Jonah is tired of life. He preferred death to life. Not because with Paul he had rather depart and be with Christ. No, he was not tired of sin, but he was tired of life because of the withering of the gourd. This was godless, for Jonah should have confessed: "*The LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the Name of the LORD*", Job 1:21. "*In all this Job sinned not*", but Jonah did.

"*And God said to Jonah: Doest thou well to be happy for the gourd?*" verse 9. The LORD condescended so low to His child and servant by questioning him kindly whether his anger was reasonable. Nowadays Jonah would be thrown from office, but the LORD had divine patience with His servant. But Jonah stuck to his answer: "*I do well to be angry, even unto death.*"

"Well, Jonah, now God's patience will be exhausted. You have provoked the LORD so much that He has lost patience with you."

It is a miracle, reader, that you and I are still alive. For when we compare our lives to Jonah's, would we get off any better than the prophet? Then Jeremiah testifies with all the people of God: "*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*", Lam. 3:22-23.

For do you know what is such a great miracle? That God is going to answer an insignificant son of man! God is not accountable to any creature, but here He gives an account of His deeds. We can read this in the last two verses of chapter four. The LORD cannot stoop any lower, so to speak, to convince His child of his unreasonableness. God's forbearance goes much deeper than Jonah's impatience. Because there has been One Who took Jonah for His account both for time and eternity. Jonah's impatience was eliminated by Christ's passive and active obedience. But here Jonah got a lesson that silenced him. For the LORD answered, it is true, but He also called Jonah to answer the question: "Jonah, who has made that gourd? Me or you?" Yes, there he was. He had no answer to that. But the LORD went on, just as He did with Job. "*Gird up now thy loins like a man, for I will demand of thee, and answer thou Me*", Job

38:3. Then Jonah had to be silent.

"Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? Declare if thou hast understanding. Who hast laid the measures thereof, if thou knowest? Or Who has stretched the line upon it? Whereupon are the foundations thereof fastened? Or Who laid the cornerstone thereof? When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy? Or Who shut up the sea with doors, where it brake forth, as if it had issued out of the womb? When I made the cloud the garment thereof, and thick darkness a swaddling band for it, and brake up for it My decreed place, and set bars and doors?" Job 38:4-10.

Yes, there they were, Job and Jonah. They were pricked in their hearts. That is a miracle of free grace because it is a fruit of Christ's silence. Christ remained silent when He was slandered by the Jews. He rested in His love in order not to blame Jonah for his anger. The LORD was going to reveal to Jonah who he was and Who God was. Jonah judged without mercy, but the LORD judged with mercy. "*And He did it not.*" Neither did He reject His servant, for He could have done because of his behaviour. "*And He did it not.*"

According to me, Jonah did not have enough time then to admire God because of His forbearance and longsuffering. Then he became a beast in the sight of God.

The Bible does not say so, writer.

Not as far as the text is concerned, but nevertheless it does say so. Only one should learn to read this. For Jonah did not contradict God's exhortations, this is a result of revealing grace. If this has really been revealed to you, you lay your hand upon your mouth. You may always have been a talker, but suddenly it is over. Then you travel the earth as a silent man. Job was so extremely tried that he was silent when God spoke. "*Teach me and I will hold my tongue and cause me to understand wherein I have erred*", Job 6:24.

Job and Jonah are brothers in grace. That people learn to be silent. Do you know that too, reader? When God is going to speak everything must be silent. Then Jonah had nothing more to say or to pray, his rage had spent itself and he preferred death. Then Christ began to speak in His silence. Do you understand this now? There are many people who pretend to believe. But have you ever heard this most beloved Lord Jesus speaking in His silence? Child of the Lord, when your rage has spent itself He at times begins to whisper so sweetly in your heart that your heart is ablaze with love and guilt. For then God comes with the Gospel and He does not reproach you with your sins. The law has been

silenced in the sacrifice of Christ. Therefore the people of God have a God Who speaks, also in His silence.

"Let me now hear what the Lord God will speak for to His saints who in their hearts Him seek, He will proclaim His steadfast words of peace."

The life of faith is paired to God speaking in your soul and to the miracles of His providential leading.

Jonah had a God Who spoke. The LORD said: *"Jonah, 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"*, verse 10.

"Jonah, that tree is a free gift of grace. You did nothing for it", the LORD meant to say here. The LORD admonished Jonah most sweetly, though. He instructed His servant to convince him of his wrong. That is God's work. Only God can convince a man and bend his will. And man is always wrestling against this. Or are you so willing, reader? Do you not know these wrestlings? By nature we are like fish in water. But if God wants to glorify His grace in your life, you will one day get the hook in your mouth to be pulled out of the old wicked nature. There are many people who pretend to be converted, but most of them do not know about fighting against God.

But writer, that is a great sin, isn't it?

Ah, friend, we do nothing else but fight against God. A man fights against God the hardest with a pious face, even if he walks over the earth with a wry face. If a preacher only preaches Christ to lost sinners, he is most troubled by people who go to the Lords Table with a fair show outwardly without being washed from their filthiness.

True, Jonah was honest in his anger against God's dealings, for in verse 9 he said: *"I do well be angry, even unto death."* Jonah was so angry that he was on the point of ending his life. But the LORD kisses all that anger away, for He usually strikes His people with love! I have at times thought God would chastise me harshly, but then He consumed my heart with His love. Ah, friends, this I cannot bear, then my heart must melt and everything snaps inside.

I have a friend, who in his youth drove a truck with which he delivered meat to his customers every day. One of his customers was an old lady who always told him about the love of Christ in seeking lost sinners. At that time my friend still lived a worldly life and he had a ready tongue. But when he came to the old lady his mouth was shut, for he could not bring anything against this love. And there she was, talking about it again and again. "I could not stand it

any longer", my friend said. And when he delivered meat again he secretly opened the kitchen door, smote the meat on the dresser and was gone. He could not bear that love. He felt his heart melt, but he did not want this. Later on he did, for God stepped in with His love. Do you now see how the LORD brings a man to submit? By love! *"And should I not spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than six score thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand, and also much cattle?"* verse 11.

"Jonah, just look at all these little children. Just look at all these thousands of babies. Look at all these thousands of sinners that cannot distinguish between their right hand and their left hand. Jonah, have you forgotten your origin? Jonah, have you forgotten I picked you up from the open field, polluted in your own blood and that nobody pitied you? Then I had compassion on you by free, sovereign grace. Jonah, look at all these animals which because of your sins are also subject to the same judgment. Jonah, this also applies to you. Should I not spare that vast city that repented at your preaching and is now crying for mercy? Should I not remember My mercy? Ah, Jonah, how hardened your heart is. Come here, My child." *"I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way thou shalt go; I will guide thee with My eye"*, Ps. 32:8.

Yes, so gently does the Lord deal with His people, for He loves them with an everlasting love.

Oh, people of the Lord, when this love is going to flow, all your gourds will wither. But then you need no more gourd. When God in Christ takes possession of your soul you don't need to be converted and to be saved anymore, because then Christ is your Conversion. Then God is sufficient for you. Then you don't need a minister and at that moment no more sermon, for then you are blessed because the God of salvation lives within you. Then you don't need to talk anymore, because then God is speaking and you may listen and delight yourself in God. Have you no more to say, reader?

Together we have been reflecting on the history of Jonah. But may I ask you: "Have you ever been overcome by God's love?"

Jonah had to get rid of his gourd because God wanted to bestow His love on His child. We should not complicate God so much, for God is only love to His people. They can never sin themselves out of His love!

What you are saying now, writer, is antinomian.

Yes, that is what most church-goers think, for they do not have the Gospel of Christ but the law as their moral rule of life, just like the rich young man. But the law curses and the Gospel pardons. When you are dead to the law and live through faith of the Son of God, you have an understanding by experience. By nature nobody can understand these things. How disappointing it will be if you think you can appear before God with a decent and upright life.

But should one not live decently?

Nobody does. O yes, maybe outwardly, but God looks right through your black fine clothes. Do you know what God sees behind your finery? A heart filled with deadly snakes and unclean fowls. I cannot even express in words how vile our hearts are. *"The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?" Jer. 17:9.*

But did you know the way is much narrower for those who fear the Lord than for those so-called decent and upright people? For those who fear the Lord experience the path gradually becomes narrower. Then there are things in life in which a religious man can live, but those people cannot because God is nowhere in them. These may be the things which nothing can be said against. But the point is whether a man can find the Life in all these things.

But should we always be occupied by these things then?

Oh, poor soul, there are times that people want nothing but this because God takes possession of them. God cannot do without them. God could not do without Jonah. That is why He overwhelmed Jonah with that love which even makes the hardest heart melt. For the Lord wants to bestow His love on a loveless man. That is why He leaves an afflicted and poor people that is so poor that they trust in His Name. That people become so poor in themselves that when God withholds His love for some time they are at a loss and go over the earth saying nothing. Then they go their way weeping and sighing. Why does the Lord do that? To draw His people nearer to Him so that they hunger and thirst after Christ's righteousness. That people hunger and thirst after His communion. At times they desire to depart and be with Christ so that they sometimes cry out: *"God of life, O when shall I come again to stand before Thee, in Thy temple and adore Thee?"* These are the poor in spirit.

Beloved, do you know who are really poor in spirit?

Who at the deadly hour have been cut off from all self-righteousness and in Christ have received a divine right to be with the Lord forever. These souls become so poor

because they have tasted the riches of His loving-kindness so that they consider worthless anything that is not God in Christ for the rest of their lives. Then you do not see any value in the seeming happiness of all the religious gourds, because you have eaten from the Apple Tree Christ. *"As the apple tree among the trees of the wood, so is my Beloved among the sons. I sat down under His shadow with great delight, and His fruit was sweet to my taste", Song of Sol. 2:3.*

Why did the LORD allow Jonah's gourd to wither?

So that Jonah with the Bride in the Song of Solomon would long again for the shadow of Christ. *"He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty", Ps. 91:1.*

His shadow protects the soul of His turtle-dove against the wild beasts that spare nothing. The Lord gathers His people under the skirt of His mantle. He covers His people with His righteousness. His sheep are always safe, for He is the Good Shepherd Who leads His sheep in the green pastures of His everlasting testimony. The mangiest sheep are welcome with Him. The blackest sheep are washed and made white in His blood. Then they become black again because in the way of sanctification the Sun of Righteousness will look upon them. For when I see Christ I become as black as the night because He is the Light of the world in and for me.

Jonah became black because of the Sun of Righteousness. That is why the gourd had to wither. The earthly sun made Jonah pant for breath so that the way should be paved for the Sun of Righteousness. Jonah became silent because of the divine light that shone forth from His countenance. He could join the bride in the Song of Solomon and say: *"Look not upon me, because I am black, because the sun has looked upon me", Song of Solomon 1:6.* Then the Lord whispered in his heart: *"O My dove, thou art in the clefts of the rock, in the secret places of the stairs, let Me see thy countenance, let Me hear thy voice, and thy countenance is comely", Song of Solomon 2:14.* Because Jonah's name means: dove!

When the LORD reminded Jonah of this he felt ashamed towards God and man, for he was no dove but a bird of prey for the Ninevites. Then he stole off secretly. He will certainly have felt ashamed towards the Ninevites, for the Son had shone upon him. Then he became so black inwardly that he could not but think that he was also black outwardly.

Beloved reader, when you get to know how black you are inwardly, you feel ashamed towards God and man. Then

you will say to your wife: "Dear, go to the baker, because I dare not appear in the street any longer." You will say to your son: "John, you take my bike to the bicycle shop, for dad is such a monster."

Then I hear Jonah say: "Ninevites, do not open the gates for me now, for I am going out of the camp, bearing His reproach, for the Sun has looked upon me. Ninevites, you are better than I am, for I am a murderer, a fool and a wicked rebel who deserves nothing but hell."

Do you know what Jonah said? "LORD, let me just declare Thy praise for some time, then I shall go to hell myself."

God's people are made willing through free grace, for the LORD does not want slaves. He makes willing what is unwilling. "*Thy people shall be willing in the day of Thy power, in the beauties of holiness from the womb of the morning: Thou hast the dew of thy youth*", Ps. 110:3.

When the Lord comes again in the clouds of heaven He will have a most willing people. This is His own work, for He is the King of kings and the LORD of lords. Every knee shall bow before Him. The clouds are the dust of His feet. Then there are times that I desire only one thing, namely, to proclaim His praise the rest of my life. "*In the night His song shall be with me and my prayer unto the God of my life.*"

Oh, if only I could provoke you to jealousy, reader. For the service of God is such a sweet service. Christ's commandments are not grievous. His yoke is easy and His burden is light. The Lord actually said to His servant: "*Learn of Me, for I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest unto your soul.*"

And to Peter the Lord did not say: "Simon, you should have become meek by now", did He? Do not be silly. In sanctification the Lord does not come with the law, but with the Gospel. He comes with Himself. "*Learn of Me, for I am...!*" Wonderful, isn't it? He speaks and gives. He teaches and converts. He seeks and finds. Christ is the good Shepherd Who gives His life for the sheep. Sheep that have no sanctification, but are complete holy in Him!

But we must live according to God's commandments, mustn't we?

But, by nature we don't, do we? Every day we steal whatever we can steal, in words, deeds and thoughts.

But the law is a rule of life, isn't it?

How much progress have you made already? Shall I tell? "I give tithes of all that I possess, I give everyone his due, I

am a poor and humble man, I really do not hurt a fly." This looks good, but it is no more than a rich young man's life. If you die like that man you are doomed, because the rich young man has no more than law. But if you live and die as the poor Lazarus, you will live for ever, because Lazarus has no more than Gospel. "*And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom*", Luke 16:22.

What is Gospel? I am a monster, Christ is my Lamb. I am a hell, Christ is my Heaven. I am a fool, Christ is my Wisdom. I am darkness, Christ is my Light. I am a lost sheep, Christ is my Shepherd. I am a slough of sin, Christ is my Fountain of Salvation. I am a beggar, Christ is my Redeemer. I am a wicked man, Christ is my Righteousness. I am a dead sinner, Christ is my Life. I am an unholy man, Christ is my Holiness. I am a 'nought', Christ is my All. *Amen! Dear Lord Jesus!*

But I also want to do something through love. writer.

Well, have you already started? I still have to begin. I still have to find a beginning! Fortunately, for Christ is the Alpha. I will never attain to it. Fortunately, for Christ is also the Omega. So being saved is doing nothing and leaning on the righteousness of Christ. Also in sanctification (1 Cor. 1:30).

But this is too easy for me, writer!

If God works it is easy because God does the impossible. Then fortunately nothing of me counts. I don't need to contribute anything to this and neither do I want to. For God is a God of complete salvation.

Christ wants to do everything, or He does nothing. He is a complete Saviour for a completely lost sinner. "*For more than Jonah is here!*" This is Christ, for He is the Fountain of life. He is mine and I am His. He in me and I in Him. In this way God's people travel to the heavenly Jerusalem. Amen.

For at least, let us sing Psalm 108:1:

*"My heart is steadfast, O my God,
And I will sing unto Thy laud,
Yes, I will make a melody
And give my thanks, o LORD, to Thee.
Awake, O harp and lyre, awake!
For I will urge the dawn to break.
I'll sing Thy glory to the nations,
Thy praise among their populations."*