



**BELIEVERS CHAPEL**

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Jonah 1:1-3

“The Doctrine of Satanic Providence”

TRANSCRIPT

The Scripture reading is found today in the Book Jonah, in the Old Testament, and then one verse in the New Testament in the Epistle to the Colossians. And then we're just going to read the first three verses of the prophecy of Jonah, and then we're going to read one verse, Colossians chapter 3 and verse 15.

Now during the series on Jonah, you hear me say “Joner,” you'll understand your ears are betraying you. [Laughter] But I am always saying, “Jonah.” But you may misunderstand. You may not be hearing it that way. And so right now in the beginning, I want to warn you that if you hear “Joner,” it's because something is the matter with you. [Laughter, Johnson laughs] Now the Book of Jonah, chapter 1 verses 1 through 3,

“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. But Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the LORD, and went down to Joppa; and he found a ship going to Tarshish: so he paid the fare thereof, and went down into it, to go with them unto Tarshish from the presence of the LORD.”

And now the one verse in the New Testament is Colossians chapter 3, and verse 15. In the verse, the Apostle Paul writes,

“And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful.”

And the words that I want to draw to your attention especially are the words, “And let the peace of God (or the peace of Christ) rule in your hearts.” That word, rule, is a word that in the Greek text has as its background this idea: to be the umpire. So let’s just render it that way. “And the let the peace of Christ be the umpire in your hearts, to which also ye are called in one body, and be ye thankful.” May God bless this reading of his word. Let’s bow together in prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we thank Thee for the opportunity and privilege of the ministry of the scriptures. We thank Thee for the greatness of them, and for the greatness of the one of whom they speak, the eternal Trinity: Jesus Christ the Son, God the Father, and the Holy Spirit.

And we thank Thee for the day in which we live. We thank Thee for the problems of life, for they cause us to turn to Thee, and to lean upon the salvation which Thou has so wonderfully made available to us through the Savior who loveth us and hath loosed us from our sins in his own precious blood.

And we thank Thee Lord for this congregation, gathered here at this moment and this hour. And we pray that the Holy Spirit may take of the things of Jesus Christ and bring them home to each one of us. And Father, we pray particularly for any who might be here who have not yet the assurance in their hearts that they know Thee and possess life. We pray that the word of God may bring them that assurance, that they may rely upon him who has given himself for them, and thus have life.

And Father, we thank Thee for those who are here with problems and trials and perplexities, and perhaps anxieties, which are the common lot of men. We pray O God that the word of God may minister peace and comfort, and may the solution to the problems of life.

We thank Thee for the fact that in this present hour we may turn to Thee, and amid the crises that are about us in the public life of this country, we have a sure hope and a peace through the Lord Jesus. We thank Thee for our country, and we pray Thy blessing upon it. Particularly, Lord, upon our President and those who are associated with him in the government of this land. Give them wisdom and guidance, and if it please Thee, Lord, through the instrumentality of the men of God and the word of God, bring them face to face with the claims of our God.

We thank Thee for the privilege of proclaiming Thy word to the uttermost parts of the earth, and Lord, we would remember before Thee those who have gone forth from this place to minister the word. We would particularly remember Bill [indistinct] and ask Thy blessing upon him in the great land to the north of us, in Canada. Wilt Thou guide and direct him and supply his needs and use him in Montreal. And we pray for others who have left here and are ministering the word. Be with them and guide them and direct them and use them in this day.

And Father, we would particularly pray for Believers Chapel. We thank Thee for that which Thou hast done. We give Thee praise. But we pray that as we face the future, with our own problems, with our own sense of burden, we pray that Thou wilt guide and direct us in a way that will give glory to Thy name, and may we be useful to Thee in the proclamation of the Lord Jesus Christ. And so, Lord, may Thy hand rest upon us for the glory of the Son of God. And we ask this in his name and for his sake. Amen.

[Message] Today we are beginning a rather brief exposition of the prophecy of Jonah, and the subject for today, we are looking at the first three verses, is “The Doctrine of Satanic Providence.”

One of the things that I have been reading again in the past few weeks with great profit has been Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress*. And if you have never read Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress*, it’s a tragedy of a minor character, and I thoroughly recommend that you read it. Someone came to me when I quoted it several times recently, and said, I went and bought that book, and I am greatly impressed with his analysis of human nature. And I’m sure that if you have never read it, you’re in for a great treat. And so I would suggest that you buy it and read it. No Christian should ever live as long as you have lived and not know something about Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress*. Now in case there are any Britishers in the audience, I’m talking about Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s PRO-gress* [laughter]. So you’ll understand.

Now, I think it will be a real tragedy if in Believers Chapel, we should have people here who do not know something of the great classics of the Christian faith, and that is surely one.

When Bunyan’s Pilgrim had abandoned The King’s Highway for Bypath Meadow, and he is about to fall into the hands of Giant Despair, the great giant who owned Doubting Castle, when he looked back and realized how difficult it was to get back into The King’s Highway after he had left it, he said, “Then I thought that it is easier going out of the way, when we are in, than going back in when we are out.” And what a tremendous amount of Christian sentiment is found in that statement. “Then I thought it was easier going out of the way when we are in, than going back in when we are out.” And I’m sure that if you have lived any of the Christian life that has become yours since you have believed in Jesus Christ, you have discovered how easy it is to get out of the way once you have come to be in the way, than it is to get back in the way when you have come to be out of the way.

Now with this painful but wise and penetrating sentiment, Jonah the Prophet from Gath-heifer, near Nazareth in Galilee, would agree, for he had a similar experience. He got out of The King’s Highway. He was led astray. Whether he went into Bypath

Meadow or not is beside the point, but he discovered he was out of the will of God. And oh how great it was, how difficult it was, for him to get back into the way once he had gotten out.

This little prophecy of Jonah, although maligned, is a skillful, well-written gem of a biography. There is, strictly speaking, only one prophecy in the Book of Jonah. It is found in the third chapter in the fourth verse. Nevertheless, Jonah is regarded as one of the Minor Prophets, and we shall speak of it as the prophecy of Jonah for that reason. It has been maligned because, of course, of the great experience he had in the first and second chapters when he found himself inside the great fish. I’m sure that many of you who are Christians, when you have discussed the Bible, have come in the course of your conversation to a discussion that finally lodged somewhere in the vicinity of this experience that Jonah had. And you’ve probably had someone say to you, “You don’t really believe that old story about the whale swallowing Jonah, do you?”

When I was growing up, I attended Sunday school in a well-known and fairly well-regarded denomination. And what I learned in my Sunday school of course could probably be contained on one sheet of paper. I do believe that Paul did some journeying over the ancient world. I knew he had some missionary journeys. I remember something about Samson and Delilah, and I remember something about David and Goliath. And then I vaguely in the back of my mind had some concept of Jonah, but I can still remember that in college I got into a discussion with one of my friends over the subject of the Bible, and in the course of it, the subject of Jonah came up and I remember distinctly not being able to express what I felt about this because I was not really sure if the whale swallowed Jonah or Jonah swallowed the whale. [Laughter] I couldn’t quite remember.

Now I do not mean to cast aspersions upon my Sunday school, because I am sure that my Sunday school teachers labored very faithfully with me, and some of them I know were Christians. Since I’ve been converted, one or two of them have come up to me and rejoiced over the fact that I have been converted. Of course, they thought I was alright

when I was in that church, because I joined the church and I was in good standing. I had been baptized and I was on the rolls of that church, and so far as the elders were concerned, I was in good standing. And the Session was quite happy with me, but I was not converted.

But there were some faithful Sunday school teachers, and so the fact that I did not know the difference is no reflection upon them. It really is a reflection upon me. At least you can say that if I did really believe that Jonah swallowed the whale [laughter], that’s an even bigger miracle than the other, and so I was an even greater believer in the supernatural.

Well Jonah has been greatly maligned, and we all know about that. But many of us do not realize how wonderful a prophecy this little book is. It is, of course, interesting to us that Jonah is the only Minor Prophet that is mentioned by our Lord Jesus Christ. He is so far as I can remember the only Old Testament character who is likened by Jesus Christ to himself. There are other Old Testament characters who are likened to our Lord, such as Jeremiah and Elijah, but Jonah is the only one that our Lord likens to himself.

He is the only prophet, so far as I can remember, who was sent to the Gentiles. And he is the only prophet to conceal his message. So Jonah is really an interesting character, and what he has given us is really his life story. I think that Jonah must have written this book after the conclusion of his experiences as an interpretation of the things that had happened to him. And he would have us, as we read and ponder the text, to realize that what he is doing is giving us an interpretation of the experience that he has had, and of course also, he is trying to keep us also from falling into the same traps into which he fell.

The book begins with a command that Jehovah gave to Jonah: “Now the word of the LORD came unto Jonah the son of Amittai, saying,” I am intrigued by that little “now” that begins. It’s almost as if the author of the Book of Jonah regards his text as taking up the thread of history. “And” or “now,” connecting this revelation with previous revelation.

At least Peron thinks that “The author consciously takes up the thread of history.”

Whether he does or not, I guess we cannot with finality decide, but so opens the most unusual and intriguing fish story of all time.

This past week, I read a story of a man who was sitting on a bridge with a fishing pole, fishing in a little creek. And a man came up and was observing him. And finally he stopped him and said, How are you doing? And he said, “Well, yesterday, I caught forty pike in this little stream.”

And the man said, “Do you know who I am?” And he said no. He said, “I happen to be the magistrate in this area, and furthermore, this property belongs to me.”

And the man who was fishing said, “Do you happen to know who I am?” And he said no. He said, “I’m the biggest liar in Virginia.” [Laughter] Now this is a fish story that is a true story, and I want you to remember that as we begin it.

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. Now, Jonah’s message is not really stated. He is just told that he is to go to Nineveh, and there he is to preach against the city. Whether the message is precisely the same as that that is given in the third chapter in the fourth verse, “Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown,” we shall never know. Perhaps it is.

On the other hand, it is just possible that this is a general message, and Jonah was told by God and inveigh against the wickedness of the great city of Nineveh. At any rate, we do not know his precise message. I do not think it was a self-destruct message. Jonah has not given us the message.

One thing we can notice immediately, however, and this is this. That this message that was given by God to the Prophet Jonah is not a benign, effeminate, wishy-washy message of divine love. He speaks of divine judgment. Now of course, we could not understand the Bible if we could not understand the message of love. And many of you have heard an exhortation along that line – a good one, let me say – and we should never

forget that the Bible does have a great deal to say about the love of God. But I am concerned myself because so may overemphasize the message of divine love or do not give the other side of the message of God. That is, that message that has to do with divine judgment.

And I want to be careful not to speak of divine judgment as if I am happy and joyous over it, for I am not. And everyone who ever preaches divine judgment should preach it, if not with tears upon his face, at least with tears upon his heart, because the message of divine judgment is a terrible message, but sometimes it is necessary for God to give this message, and we are not being honest with men if we always approach them on the basis of divine love. Some of them might well have said, “But God loves us.” And that would have given Jonah an opportunity to say, “I have come with a message from the true God, Jehovah, and his message is that you are wicked and that judgment is soon to come.”

You know, the New Testament speaks of saving some through fear, and in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century we have forgotten that important side of the evangelistic message of the New Testament. It is important on occasion to go to people and say to them, God loves you, but it is also extremely important that divine judgment is found in the word of God.

Now Jonah then went with a message of divine judgment, and God gives him a reason for it. He says, “For their wickedness is come up before me.” Now, Nineveh’s wickedness was proverbial. I wish that we had time to talk about all of the things that had to do with this, but that is impossible. But let me just sum up a few of the things that tell the story of the brutality of Nineveh.

The Assyrians, when they conquered a city, as a general rule did not leave garrisons behind to control the peoples that they conquered. They did not have the manpower to do that. And consequently, since they could not afford large amounts of occupation forces, they usually engaged in just a little bit more brutality than was



common in order to give the people who they had just conquered a definite message. And that message came home very clearly, I’m sure.

One of the first things that they did was to select some of the outstanding citizens and slaughter them. Now that was the beginning. We read in the Bible some of the instances of this as, for example, as when Sennacherib was Lachish. But then a second thing that they did was take some of those that had been conquered and then after bringing them out before the people and gloating over them considerably with fiendish delight – they used to like to take their hands and read down into the mouths of their victims and grasp their tongue and wrench the whole tongue out – that conveyed a message, too.

But that was not all that they did. They would frequently take a man, lay him out, or make him lie down upon the ground, fasten his arms and feet to stakes. And when they had stretched him to the place where the skin was almost ready to tear, they would take a knife and cut it at the appropriate place and begin to tear off the skin. And they would flay the person alive. And they would take that skin and hang it on the city walls in order that as you came to the city, you would get the city. And many got the message, of course.

And then another thing that they did was take individuals, stretch them out upon the ground, tie them, take a long pole with a sharp end, take that sharp end and plunge it right down in their stomach, just below the ribs. And when they had finished with that, they would take the body and take the body up in the air like this, take the body over to a hole they had dug, stick the body down in the hole so that the body of the writhing victim was there for everyone to see, and they would sit around and watch him die.

Now if I were to say more, you would accuse me of violence in the pulpit [laughter], so I won’t say any more. I think you can see from this that when Jonah is told that he is to cry against the city of Nineveh for their wickedness is come up before me, that there is undoubtedly justification for this. Of course, this was simply the physical

manifestation of the hearts of the Ninevites. It was their inner man that God was most concerned with, for that, of course, is the source of the other.

Sometimes in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, men say, Is God really alive or is he not? Is he really working? Why doesn’t God do something? Wasn’t it H.G. Wells who said during the last war that “Either God is all-powerful and doesn’t care, or else he cares and is not omnipotent.” Does God care? Why doesn’t God do something, we say.

Well, the truth of the matter is that God does do something. The men of Jonah’s day might well have said, “Why doesn’t God do something about that wicked Assyrian Empire? Why doesn’t he do something about Nineveh?” Well the truth of the matter is that God did do something about Nineveh, and he was thinking about doing something concerning Nineveh all along. But there is a principle in God’s dealings, and that is the principle of longsuffering. And consequently, he waited, and he waited, and he waited until the propitious and auspicious time. But when that time came, he acted. And Jonah of course was called upon to be an instrumentality in admonition to the city of Nineveh, to warn Nineveh that God does do something.

William Cowper said, “God moves in a mysterious way his wonders to perform.” And I fully believe that in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century God is doing something. We may see all of the things transpiring upon the international scene and wonder, is it possible that God is doing something. Well, the answer is that he is doing something. We may wonder about the violence. About the lawlessness. About the sexual immorality that pervades the life of the United States, and we may really wonder, is God doing something about it, and you can be absolutely sure that he is doing something about it. He has not abdicated his throne.

And so God spoke to a prophet by the name of Jonah, from the little village of Gath-heifer, just a mile or two north of Nazareth in Galilee. The only one of the Minor Prophets, I believe, who came out of Galilee, something which the scribes and Pharisees of our Lord’s day apparently forgot.

Now what would you expect a prophet to do? Well, you would have expected that Jonah would write in the third verse, “And Jonah rose up to go to Nineveh.” But we read in the third verse, “But.” Jonah thought, this is mission impossible [laughter]. “But, Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish.” In other words, God said, 500 miles to the north and to the east, and Jonah takes out 2,000 miles to the west. But.

You know, these little “buts” in the Bible are most interesting. And in the fourth verse which we shall consider next time, there is a but in the fourth verse which cancels the but of Jonah: “But Jonah rose up to flee to Tarshish, BUT the Lord sent out a great wind into the sea.” It’s very difficult to escape the will of God. In fact, it is impossible. But anyway, Jonah made his attempt. He wants to annul God’s purpose. But God, as I say, has a but that negates Jonah’s. But he’s going to give him a fairly long line, and so Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the Lord.

Why did the prophet flee? Was he afraid? Well, after all these stories that I’ve told, if he had heard them, perhaps he would have been. I don’t think, really, however, that that was the reason Jonah fled. In a moment, in the fifth verse, we read, “Then the mariners were afraid, and cried every man unto his god, and cast forth the wares that were in the ship into the sea, to lighten it of them. But Jonah was gone down into the sides of the ship; and he lay, and was fast asleep.” The storm that stirred that stirred up so much those seaworthy mariners apparently did not disturb Jonah enough. But perhaps Jonah was sleeping because he was trying to sleep off this rebellion against God.

You know, it is true psychologically that often when we try to escape the will of God, one of the ways we do it is by way of going and falling upon our beds and trying to go to sleep. Some hit the bottle, some hit the bed. Others have various ways of escaping the things that face us. But I think the twelfth verse makes it without question that Jonah was not afraid, for we read, “And he said unto them, Take me up, and cast me forth into the sea; so shall the sea be calm unto you: for I know that for my sake this great tempest

is upon you.” Jonah was not afraid of his life. He was willing to give up his life. So it wasn’t for fear that he fled to Tarshish.

Could it be because of bigotry? Was it just because he didn’t like Ninevites? Was it just because he did not like Gentiles? After all, he was a Jew and Jewish prophet. Was that the reason? Well if it is, there is no evidence of it from the Book of Jonah. He is not blamed for his bigotry.

Could it have been pride? Well, I happen to be a preacher and Jonah, through a prophet, was also a preacher, and I think I can understand how he might have felt: “Lord, you have told me to go to Nineveh and you have told me to cry out against the wickedness of that city; but Lord I know (as he says in the fourth chapter) you are a merciful God, and they’re going to repent, and what are people going to say? When I say, the Lord is going to judge the city of Nineveh, they’re going to turn to him and the judgment is not going to be poured out, and they’re going to say, Jonah is just a prophet crying, wolf, wolf, or something like that.” And remember, Jonah had prophesied with accuracy before this time, so we are told in 2 Kings chapter 14 and verse 25. So it is possible that Jonah was worried about his reputation as a prophet. I’ve known preachers who are worried about their reputation as preachers. But again, the text of Jonah does not say anything about that.

Actually, the only clue to Jonah’s flight we have is in the second verse of the fourth chapter, and this is where we read there, “But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was very angry. (Verse 2) 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: (this “my saying” means I knew they would repent, as is described in the third chapter) for I knew that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil.” Jonah knew that Assyria was destined to overthrow Israel. If he preached to them, then they would be saved. And of course, Israel’s judgment would be the more sure. If he did not preach to them, then Israel might

be saved from them. And so, perhaps the only thing to do is to escape my prophetic calling and go to the west and thus Nineveh will not be converted and perhaps spare Israel.

If that’s not it, there is at least something of it in Jonah’s flight. There may be also a suggestion from the text of the Book of Jonah as we look at in the light of the New Testament, that Jonah realized that for him to be called by God to go to Nineveh was a rebuke to Israel in itself. And that’s the way our Lord Jesus refers to this incident in the New Testament times. He speaks about the Ninevites rising up in judgment against this generation. And he who was sent to Israel has found that they have rejected him, and he reminds them of the fact that Jonah was sent to the north, to Nineveh, because there arose a day in Israel’s history in the past when God turned from them. It was the evidence of divine judgment upon them. And perhaps Jonah has mingled this with his own feelings as I’ve expressed it, and there is only one hope for Israel: to escape, to leave the office of prophet entirely. And perhaps somehow or other, Israel might be spared.

Now when we read in that third verse, Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. This is not a statement that is to be understood locally, as if Jonah felt God dwelt only in Israel and did not dwell in Spain, where Tarshish was. Jonah knew more theology than that. It’s surprising that some can say that that probably was Jonah’s thought. Jonah was well versed in systematic theology. He had not been to Dallas Theological Seminary of course, and thus his learning was deficient in many aspects no doubt [laughter], but you can be sure of this, that he did understand some basic facts about the omnipresence of God.

He knew the Psalms. As a matter of fact, in the second chapter, he writes us a psalm. He knew the Psalms of David. He knew the statements of the Old Testament because he builds his psalms upon the previous revelation. And he knew all of this. He knew that wherever men went, there as God. He knew the truth of the 139<sup>th</sup> Psalm, the seventh through the tenth verses.

When we read here that he arose to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the Lord, he was using an expression that might be called a technical expression. When a priest in his office, he was spoken of as serving in the presence of the Lord. He served before the Lord. As a matter of fact, this precise Hebrew expression is found in the Book of Deuteronomy in order to express the official ministry of a priest. Now Jonah, of course, was a prophet, but he, too, was an official in Israel. And consequently, when we read here that he rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the Lord, we're not to understand that he thought he could escape God in the sense of his omnipresence. But he was really trying to resign his prophetic office. He did not want to be forced to go to Nineveh by God. That was what he had in mind.

Now then, what do you do when you want to disobey God? Well, let's see what the prophet does. Have you ever had this experience? Have you ever felt that God has spoken directly to you concerning the word of God and you have disobeyed him? You have not responded to it? Is it possible that you have seen some truth in the scriptures which has come to you with convincing force, and you know that you should respond to it, but you have been disobedient?

Well let me be very specific. And I hope I will not step on any toes. But let's just suppose for example that you happen to be associated with a religious organization that is apostate. I'm not speaking about one that is not apostate; but let's suppose that from leadership from the top to the bottom it is apostate. There is no question about it.

Now, the scriptures say, that there shall arise those that have a form of godliness but deny the power thereof; from such turn away. But, if I turn away, I must turn away from my family. From my friends. From the people with whom I hope to have some standing. From prestige perhaps. But here is the word of God and here is the pull of association. Who has not felt this? I sympathize greatly with you if that happens to be your problem. I happen to have gone through that. In fact, I'm not completely over it yet, I guess. Every now and then, some of my old Presbyterianism comes up again.

Now, I don’t want to blame the Presbyterian Church; I’m just speaking of my own experience. Conditions may be different, now. But we all face these problems.

Perhaps it’s nothing like that with you. Perhaps it’s just a simple statement from the word of God, that you know has spoken from the heart of God, and has condemned something that you know you are doing and you stand in opposition to the word of God. What do you do? Do you rise up and flee to Tarshish, like Jonah? Do you think you can escape? Well, do you not know that God is able to send big fishes out into the sea now to swallow you up in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century also? Oh I doubt very much that we’re going to see this miracle again. But we can see some very similar things. Many of us as Christians in disobedience have discovered that the hand of God is a very wide hand, and that his arm is very long, and that it can reach out and grasp us wherever we are.

And you know, I’m very thankful that God is like that. It would be a terrible thing if he would let me go on in my disobedience to him. How would you like to have had a father who didn’t care whether you obeyed him or not? Look around in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. There are many of them. There are thousands, there are millions of fathers who do not care about their children. They do not care whether they obey or not. And then when their children become little demons they look around and say, I wonder why, I wonder why.

I heard of a man who took his child who he could not handle to a psychiatrist’s office. And they went in and sat down and the little boy was really a demon. He reached over on the psychiatrist’s desk, and he took hold of his pen and pencil set, and he threw them down on the ground. And walked around, did a few other things like that. And finally the psychiatrist couldn’t stand it any more, and he just reached over and whacked that boy across the face – WHAAP! – like this [laughter], and said, “Sit down!” Well the boy went over and sat down, and father looked at mother and said, “I wonder why we didn’t think of that.” [Loud, extended laughter]

It would be a terrible thing, you know, if we didn't care for our children. And so I am so thankful, really, that when I get out of the will of God, God's long arm reaches out after me, and I cannot get very far before I discover that he has put another obstacle in my way, and what I thought was the easy way to Tarshish has proven to be something entirely different. But let's see what the prophet did.

Horace Greeley said, "Go west, young man." Jonah preferred his advice to God's. He went down to Joppa. That's the present day Jaffa. He went down to Joppa, and he found a ship going to Tarshish. He paid the fare and went down into it to go with them to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. Circumstances were just right for a trip to Spain. So the prophet takes his vacation. Someone has said, "When a person decides to run from the Lord, Satan always provides complete transportation facilities." [Laughter] For a moment.

Now I have two or three conclusions I want to draw from this incident in the five minutes or so that remain. The first truth is a very simple one, and that is this. That every step out of God's will is a step downward. Have you ever noticed how in the Bible this often put in just this way? When Abraham got out of the will of God and went to Egypt, the text of scripture says he went down into Egypt. Now here, Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the Lord and went down to Joppa -- that's the first step; *down* to Joppa -- and he found a ship going to Tarshish and he paid the fair and went *down* into it, down into the ship. In the 15<sup>th</sup> verse we read, "And the took Jonah and cast him (I think we could say) *down* into the sea." Third step. Down into Joppa. Down in the ship. Down in the sea. And then in the 17<sup>th</sup> verse, now the Lord had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah, and Jonah was in the belly -- we could almost say *down* in the belly -- so down to Joppa, down to the ship, down to the sea, down into the fish's belly. And then in the second chapter, the third verse, we read, "For Thou hadst cast me into the deep." Down into the deep.



So every step of the way, five fold: down, down, down, down, down. The Prophet of Jehovah one day; the next day in the belly of a fish in the deep. Every step out of God’s will is a step downward. And furthermore, every step out of the will of God that costs pain and suffering and labor and shame.

I’ll never forget in Dallas Seminary over the years the number of young men – and we do have a number – because you see, life is just the same in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century as it was in the century in which Jonah lived, the 8<sup>th</sup> Century, B.C. I’ll never forget as I look back over the history. I sat in my chair and just tried to reflect. There are many stories of course that I could never tell you in an audience like this, of the things that have befallen young men who came to a theological seminary supposedly to prepare to teach the word of God.

I do remember one young man who came with a history of effective Christian service behind him with young people. He came to Dallas, became fairly prominent rapidly because he was gifted with young people, but it wasn’t long before he fell into sin and there were several steps downward. Where he is today I do not know. I hope he has recovered.

The second thing I want you to notice is the difficulty of getting back into God’s will. We go away from him fast. We come back to him slowly. In fact, the whole story of the first two chapters is the story of how God brought Jonah back into fellowship with himself. So easy to depart; so hard to come back. Or, as Pilgrim put it, “Then I thought it was easier going out of the way when we’re in than going back in when we’re out.” As a matter of fact, God had more difficulty in getting Jonah back into fellowship with him than he did in saving the great city of Nineveh of perhaps 600,000 people.

Now finally, the last lesson, the most important lesson, is this. There is a divine providence. There is also Satanic providence. Let me say it again. I have found that Christians need this almost more than anything else in their practical daily life. There is a

divine providence that guides our steps. There is also a Satanic providence that would seek to capture us and guide our steps.

Now what this leads up to is simply this: that circumstances can never be of any significance to us in the guidance of God. Let’s think for a moment about Jonah. He receives a call from God. Perhaps he’s puzzling over it. Now he flees. He doesn’t want to face the word of God, and so he flees. I think I’ll go down to Joppa. And on the way, he thinks of where he may go. What about Tarshish? That’s 2,000 miles away. That’s a long way away from Palestine, and I won’t be called upon to exercise my prophetic office.

And so when he arrives, he walks down to the wharf. And he walks up to one of the ticket booths that are there, and he said, how much is the fare to Tarshish? And they say, so-and-so. He pulls out his pocketbook, and he said, well isn’t that interesting? I have enough money to go. Circumstances are favorable to Tarshish. By the way, what is that precise fare? Well, the precise fare is so-and-so. Well isn’t that striking? I happen to have the exact change in my pocketbook. And so he takes it out and puts it on the counter and takes his ticket. And as he walks off, he has no peace down within, but in his mind he’s thinking and constantly rationalizing, over and over again, trying to justify himself: You know, I’ve come down to Joppa, and it just so happens there is a ship going to Tarshish, and I was thinking about Tarshish on the way down. Not only that, but I have enough money to pay for that ticket without asking for a clerical discount [laughter], and when I got down there I had the precise amount in my pocket – the exact change. Why, this must have been God’s will.

Rubbish. Nonsense. As the British would say, balderdash! [Laughter] We might as well say a thief happened by your house last night -- king of diamonds, perhaps -- and it just so happened that you left your back door open. And the thief, arriving at the back door should put his hand down, turn the latch, and sure enough it is open and he should say, “Sure enough, it is divinely providential that I am here at this precise time [laughter].”

Or it may be that you have left your door open and someone has come in with a gun in his pocket, and during the resulting fracas he pulls out his gun and shoots you. And he comments as he leaves, "It was divinely providential that I happen to have my gun along when an argument arose."

It is never right to do wrong. And Jonah had a word from God. It is never right to do wrong.

Or to take Joseph, for example. Joseph was the servant of Potiphar. Potiphar's wife was a woman with a strong sexual desire. She looked upon that young man and thought, this is a young man I'd like to seduce, and she tried. She persisted. And finally one day, it just so happened that Joseph came in the home and there was no one there. And Potiphar's wife sought out Joseph and said, "The men are all gone; now, lie with me." What did Jonah [sic] say?

Did he say, "Well, it must be divinely providential that the situation is as it is." No. Joseph fled. In fact, he fled in such a hurry that he left part of his garment, remember. You see, it's never right to do wrong.

The day came when David was called out by Abishai to King Saul, and Saul was asleep and Saul was his enemy. And Abishai said unto David, "God hath delivered thine enemy into thine hand this day. Now therefore let me smite him, I pray thee, with the spear even to earth and I will not smite him a second time (once will be enough)." I'll just remove him, David, and God has put him in your hands. Here he is, right before you asleep.

What did David say? The great king to be? Did he say, "This is, apparently, the providence of God. Circumstances have brought it to pass that Saul is in my hands. I must slay him." No. David replied, "Destroy him not, for who can stretch forth his hand against the Lord's anointed and be guiltless?" It's never right to do wrong.

When the children of Israel reached the city of Jericho, and the city was straightly shut up, circumstances should have led them to leave Jericho and go to another city. But

you see, it was God’s will for them to take Jericho, and though circumstances were inauspicious, that was the city that they were to take. And so let me tell you dear Christian friends, do not for one moment think that your guidance from God comes through circumstances. Circumstances are utterly indifferent in themselves. Guidance comes from God through the word of God. It’s never [sic, right] to go contrary to scripture. It’s never right to do wrong.

Secondly, through the testimony of the Holy Spirit whom God planted in your heart when you believed in Christ, and he has the authority and also the ability to make his will known to us. God is able to speak loud enough to make a willing heart hear.

And thirdly, as the final test, objectively, Colossians chapter 3 verse 15 says, “Let the peace of Christ be the umpire in your heart.” You see, the umpire who calls balls and strikes is the one who makes decisions. It’s useless to argue with an umpire. And God has a little umpire that he puts in our hearts. When we are in his will, there is peace. There is a sense of adjustment to God. When we are out of his will, try as we might, God puts a sense of maladjustment in our hearts. “There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked,” and that principle applied to the Christians. There is never peace to the Christian out of the will of God.

Circumstances? Sometimes they favor; sometimes they don’t. Sometimes they’re arranged by God; other times they’re arranged by Satan. There is a doctrine of divine providence. I regard it very highly. There is also a doctrine of Satanic providence, and I am very, very fearful of it. And when decisions are to be made, what does the word of God say? That settles many questions. But then those questions which are amoral – shall I do this or that? – when both are right in themselves, the testimony of the Holy Spirit confirmed by the peace of God given through Jesus Christ determines the path I should take.

Jonah was an unhappy man. He was out of the will of God. There is pleasure in the presence of God.

May I close, our time is up, by saying that for you who are Christians, this is a tremendous admonition against departure from the will of God. You can never be happy when you disobey the word of God. You can never be. You can put on a façade. You may make people think you’re living the victorious Christian life. But there is fruitlessness. There is a sense of anxiety deep down in the heart which you alone perhaps may know about, but it is there.

If you are here this morning and you have not yet received the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior, you too can flee from the will of God. God has given Jesus Christ to die for you upon the cross at Calvary that you might have life. That is his good news. Isn’t it interesting that the sun comes out as I pronounce the word? Good news; God’s wonderful news of salvation through Jesus Christ. Perhaps you’ve been fleeing to Tarshish to get away from the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is possible that perhaps God has divinely arranged it that you should come into this auditorium today and should hear the message concerning Christ.

And so I urge you not to flee to Tarshish, but to flee to Calvary. For God so loved the world that he have his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life. May we stand for the benediction?

[Prayer] Now may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, who loved us and gave himself for us; the love of God the Father, that special, distinguishing love which marked us out and brought us to Thyself, to himself; the fellowship and communion of the Holy Spirit that guides and directs the true saints of God, be and abide with all who know him in sincerity until Jesus comes, in whose name we ask it. Amen.