



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Jonah 3:1-10

“The Old Testament Cousin of John 3:16”

TRANSCRIPT

For the Scripture reading today will you turn with me to the last chapter of the Book of Jonah? This is the final message on the book itself, and I hope in the future – I’m not sure exactly when – I hope to give another message on the typology of the Book of Jonah. But this is the conclusion of the series on the book itself. And the subject for today is “The Old Testament Cousin of John 3:16.” And for our Scripture reading, we are reading the fourth chapter in its entirety.

For those of you who have not been here with us in the preceding meetings, you will remember that Jonah has received a call from God to proclaim the word of God to Nineveh. He has rejected that call and had the experience in the great fish. He has finally obeyed, finally proclaimed the gospel to Nineveh, and the entire city has turned to God. Now in the fourth chapter, we begin reading with the first verse, and we notice the response that this brought in the prophet:

“But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he became angry. So he prayed to the LORD, and said, “Ah, LORD, was not this what I said when I was still in my country? Therefore I fled previously to Tarshish; for I know that You *are* a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, One who relents from doing harm.

Therefore now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for *it is* better for me to die than to live!”

Then the LORD said, “*Is it* right for you to be angry?”

So Jonah went out of the city and sat on the east side of the city. There he made himself a shelter and sat under it in the shade, till he might see what would become of the city. And the LORD God prepared a plant and made it come up over Jonah, that it might be shade for his head to deliver him from his misery. So Jonah was very grateful for the plant. But as morning dawned the next day God prepared a worm, and it so damaged the plant that it withered. And it happened, when the sun arose, that God prepared a vehement east wind; and the sun beat on Jonah’s head, so that he grew faint. Then he wished death for himself, and said, “*It is* better for me to die than to live.”

Then God said to Jonah, “*Is it* right for you to be angry about the plant?”

And he said, “*It is* right for me to be angry, even to death!”

But the LORD said, “You have had pity on the plant for which you have not labored, nor made it grow, which came up in a night and perished in a night. And should I not pity Nineveh, that great city, in which are more than one hundred and twenty thousand persons who cannot discern between their right hand and their left—and much livestock?”

May God bless this reading from his word. Let’s bow in a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Our gracious God and heavenly Father, we are before Thee in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and we thank Thee for him of whom the Scriptures speak, to whom they point. We remember the days of his resurrection ministry, when with the apostles or the disciples on the road to Emmaus he turned to the Scriptures and spoke to them of the things that concerned them. And we thank Thee that beginning at Moses and all the prophets, we may find the ministry of Jesus Christ.

And Lord, we pray that through the preaching of the word we might not lose sight of the fact that it all ultimately points to him who is the salvation of Jehovah, our great Jesus. And we thank Thee, Lord, for the Holy Spirit, who has taken the words of God and has brought them home to our hearts, so that we know our need and we know him who meets that need.

And we thank Thee for this group of people who are in this auditorium, and O Father, we do pray that the Holy Spirit may have his ministry in their hearts. And we pray that he may work in such a way that those who are the sheep of the Lord Jesus might be brought to him. We thank Thee that we can rest confidently in Thee, and Thou dost control the affairs of men.

We pray Lord for our country, and we know Lord that our President is a man whom Thou canst touch and move, and we so we pray that Thou wilt move in his heart and in his life. And we pray for his administration. We pray, O God, that Thy hand may be upon it for the spiritual good of this land. And we pray especially that Thou wilt so work that some within that administration, if it should please Thee, should come to him who is to know life eternal.

We pray for the ministry of the word wherever it may be undertaken today, not only in Dallas, in Texas and in the United States, but to the uttermost parts of the earth. May the word so go forth that the church of Jesus Christ is built up and strengthened and brought forward to its time of maturity when Jesus Christ shall come from heaven and take us to be with him.

We want to particularly, Lord, pray for some who are in the hospital, and ask their hand upon them, for their good, physically and spiritually. Wilt Thou comfort and sustain the families? And we pray that Thy blessing may come through the experiences of life.

We pray, Lord, for those who are here who may be troubled and disturbed. Wilt Thou speak to them and remind them of the truths of the word of God that pertain to

them? And give them down deep in their hearts that sense of assurance of Thy presence and of Thy power in their lives.

Now we commit this meeting to Thee, the ministry of the word, the singing of the hymns of praise. May it redound to Thy glory through Jesus Christ. And we ask it in his name. Amen.

[Message] Subject for today, I repeat again, is “The Old Testament Cousin of John 3:16.” The last chapter of the Book of Jonah has its bad and its good moments. But it ends as it began with God and Jonah.

Its bad moments concern Jonah and his running away or ahead of God. Remember in the beginning, we made reference to the fact that in the first chapter, Jonah runs away from God. In the second chapter, he runs back to God. In the third chapter, he runs with God. In the fourth chapter, he runs ahead of God. It seems that God had more trouble with Jonah than he did with Nineveh. In fact, a well-known Bible teacher often says with reference to Jonah that God’s biggest problem was not the repentance of Nineveh, but the repentance of Jonah.

The good part of this last chapter is that Jonah and I hope we learn the wideness of God’s mercy. As it’s expressed in the hymn which has a stanza which we often sing, “For the love of God is broader than the measure of man’s mind, and the heart of the eternal is most kind,” so the fourth chapter of Jonah speaks to us of the love of God.

I think that this fourth chapter of Jonah is a complete testing of the liberal view that the God of the Jews was tribal deity who liked to express himself in anger and in warfare. You often read this in contemporary theological literature, that the God of the New Testament is a somewhat different God from the God of the Old Testament. I often wonder if such have ever read the Book of Jonah, for the great lesson of the fourth chapter has to do with the love of God. It is the expression of that which we find in John chapter 3 and verse 16, that text which perhaps everyone in this auditorium knows by heart:

“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”

What a sublime love: “For God so loved the world.”

You know, I never cease to be amazed at John 3:16. The Greek text puts it this way: “For so did God love the world.” The great stress rests upon that little adverb, “so.” I have spent twenty-five years trying to interpret the Greek text of the New Testament, and I must confess that I have never yet learned how to really expound that little two-lettered English word, “so.” For so did God love the world. Who could ever measure the sublime love of God as measured in the gift of our Lord Jesus Christ?

But not only that, we read that he so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, a sacrificial gift. He so loved that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in him – or every believer in him – should not perish but have everlasting life. Luther spoke of John 3:16 as a miniature gospel, and even when he was on his death bed, he said, “What Spartan saying can be compared with this wonderful brevity? It is a Bible unto itself.” And in his dying moments, he again repeated the words, three times over, “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” And in spite of this great manifestation of the love of God, the world has not responded.

That same Luther also said, “If I were as our Lord God,” and he said this in his own vivid way, “If I were as our Lord God, and these vile people were as disobedient as they now be, I would knock the world in pieces.” “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” Who could ever expound a text like that? Who could ever expound the love of God as it expressed in a text like that?

Sometime ago I was reading a text that comes out of one of the inspired books. It’s one of the few texts that I think would have caused me as a young Christian to wonder if perhaps it ought not to be in the inspired word. It’s a text in which the author of Ecclesiasticus moves into a description of the creation of God, and in the midst of the greatness of his description of the creation of God, he utters the words, “As is his majesty, so also is his mercy.” And that I take to be a Scriptural truth. As is the majesty of God as expressed in his works, so is his mercy as expressed in his redemptive work.

When we speak about the wisdom of God, we do not speak about the wisdom of of God, we speak about the omniscience of God. When we speak about the power of God, we do not speak about the fact that he is simply strong. We say that he is all powerful, that he is omnipotent; as is his majesty, so is his mercy. And he is just as merciful as he is majestic. And that comes out not only in John 1:16, it comes out in Jonah chapter 4, the chapter that we’re going to study.

Prophets and preachers are alike. They are men of like passions with you. And here we have a good example of it. You would think that Jonah would not have reacted the way he reacted to the great work of God that had been done in Nineveh. You might think that perhaps if he were a modern prophet or preacher he would probably would have rushed off to Western Union and fired off a telegram to denominational headquarters announcing the great work that had been done and the number of decisions that had been made. Or he was in non-denominational activity, he would have quickly drawn up a prayer letter and would have sent his prayer letter off to his constituency. And he would have spoken about the decision that had been recorded, and he probably would also have said a word about how much money they needed to complete the work in Nineveh [laughter].

I’m sure if modern preachers had been involved, would have had the newspaper reporters called in, and they would have been told of the great work that had been done, and every effort would have been made to publicize what had happened, and indirectly

to gain some of the praise for ourselves, because we have been responsible for the preaching of the word that has brought this great response.

And I must confess I am really startled when I read the fourth chapter, “But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was very angry.” The Hebrew text says, “it was evil with a great evil to Jonah.” Why was he so disgruntled? Was he disgruntled over the sparing of Nineveh just simply because of bigotry? Is it simply because Jonah was an Israelite and the Ninevites were Gentiles? Is that the reason? Well, I don’t really think so.

It is because he was fearful? I don’t think so. It is because, perhaps, he was proud of his prophetic reputation, and now it appeared as if he had given a false prophecy, for he had said, “Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be destroyed,” and Nineveh was not destroyed. Nineveh repented and turned to God. Is it perhaps that he was disappointed and thought that perhaps the news might get back to Palestine that he had prophesied something that did not come to pass? Well I think I could understand that feeling, but it does not seem to be expressed in this text at all.

I am inclined to think that the answer to the question arises out of the love of Jonah for Israel and that his reasoning was something along this line. He knew that Israel had backslidden from God and were in danger of apostatizing from him, and his message had included that before he was ever called to Nineveh. And he well knew the fact that when nations depart from God or even the nation departs from God, spiritual principles begin to operate, and they come under the chastisement and eventually the judgment of God. And Jonah loved his country. He refers to it here in the fourth chapter: “when I was yet in my country.”

And I think also that Jonah knew that Nineveh, the great capital of Assyria, was likely to be the land that would bring judgment upon them, the land of Israel. It’s not long after the time of Jonah that the Prophet Isaiah begins his ministry and speaks about the judgment that God is going to bring on through Assyria, and Jonah may well have had word from God to that effect. And he looked to the north and saw that great, cruel,

brutal land of Assyria, and realizing that that was the land that was going to perhaps be the instrument in God’s hand to bring judgment upon Israel, he was very unhappy about taking a message to them because, as he said, he knew God was a merciful God. And Nineveh might turn to the Lord, and if Nineveh returned to the Lord, what a rebuke that would be to his nation.

Not only would it be a rebuke to his nation – and that by the way is the use that Jesus makes of the Jonah story – it would be a rebuke to his nation and also it would seal their doom, he felt. For not only now is Israel backslidden, Nineveh has turned to the Lord, and surely judgment is to come upon us. And so it appears to me that that is the reason why Jonah felt that this was a great evil, the conversion of Nineveh.

And the text adds that he was very angry, and that Hebrew word or expression means “and it was hot to him.” I think that’s the Hebrew way of saying “he was hot under the collar” over what had happened in Nineveh. He was burned up, we might say. So what do you do?

Well, one thing you can say for Jonah, he didn’t take it to someone else. He took it right to God, and I think this is in evidence of the fact that he genuinely belongs to God. He is a believer. And when he complains, he doesn’t complain about God; he complains to God.

And I think, too, when we remember that the Book of Jonah has been given us by Jonah, the regard that we have for the prophet must rise because it is Jonah who exposes Jonah, though he does it later. And so he complains to God, and he says, “I pray Thee, O Lord, was this not my saying when I was yet in my country? Therefore I fled unto Tarshish, for I knew that Thou art a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and of great kindness, and repentest Thee of evil.” I knew what was going to happen, and I knew that through the mercy shown to Nineveh, Israel would be rebuked, and their judgment would be that much more sure and certain.

And so he prays, “Therefore, O Lord, take, I beseech Thee, my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live.” These words that the prophet utters in prayer are words that the prophets frequently uttered. Elijah offered a prayer very much like that. After the great ministry he had accomplished the great ministry on Carmel, word came that Jezebel was after him. And he raced off to hide from her because he’s no better off than his fathers.

And Jonah is despondent with the same kind of despondency but with less reason for it, for he doesn’t have a Jezebel after him. I must confess, I’ve always rather sympathized with the prayer of Elijah, because to have a Jezebel interested in your life is a very serious thing. But Jonah does not even have that.

Isn’t it interesting, too, how the prophets always seem to fall into the trap of discouragement? It’s not only the preachers, but it is also we who are the people, too. There is an old story – of course it’s just a story – about the day when the devil wished to sell all of his tools and go out of business. An announcement was made, stating that he was offering all of his instruments for sale to anyone who would buy by the price.

And on the night of the sale, all the tools were set forth on display, and what a sorrowful lot they were: malice, hatred, envy, jealousy, sensuality, deceit and all the other implements of evil were spread out. But in one corner of the room there was a harmless-looking wedge-shaped tool, much worn and priced higher than any of the others. And someone asked the devil, “What was that tool?”

He said, “It’s discouragement.”

“Why do you have it priced so high?”

“Because it’s more useful to me than any other tool I own,” he said. “With it, I can pry open and get inside a man’s consciousness, when I cannot get near him with any of the others. And once inside, I can use him in whatever way it suits me best.

“It’s worn so much because I use it with nearly everybody, and so yet very few people know it belongs to me.” The devil’s price for the tool of discouragement was so high that it was never sold according to the story. He still owns it and is still using it.

Every Christian knows the danger and the sin of discouragement. Would you think that I was ever discouraged? Well, I am. I am often discouraged. And whenever I think of the discouragement that comes over me from time to time, I think of one of two things. Number one, it often is connected with selfishness. And then also, I think it is connected with the fact that we are not satisfied with that which God brings in our lives. Discouragement; that is a great tool of the devil. I’d like to get hold of that great wedge-shaped tool if I possibly could, but he still uses it. And he still uses it with me.

Jonah is very discouraged. What shall he do? Well, God, fortunately is the kind of being who does not leave his own in the lurch. If we have a discouraged brother or sister in the church, the elders get together and form a committee to go and speak to that person. If they do not respond, then we usually say something like this, “Well, let them stew in their own juice. They’ll discover that they’re out of the will of God, and the suffering will be such that they will be brought back.” And so we sometimes tend to abandon them.

But God does not abandon the discouraged prophet. He comes and he asks him a question. “Doest thou well to be angry, Jonah? You’ve just experienced my grace; are you now angry when I extend it to Nineveh?” And the questions which God brings to us are often questions that are designed to teach us something. Right in the beginning of the Bible, when Adam and Eve fall into sin, it is God who comes with his questions. And you’ll remember when he came down into the garden, he said, “Where art Thou?” number one.

Then he says, “Who told thee that thou wast naked, Adam? Hast thou eaten of the tree whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldest not eat?” And he has a question for the woman, too, “What is this that thou hast done?” All of these questions of God are

designed to stir us up. And the questions come to us, to, when we are out of the will of God. What doest thou, here, Elijah? What is this that thou hast done? Doest thou well to be angry? Doest thou well to be discouraged?

So, God’s love is manifested even in our failures. I am very encouraged over that. I believe in the perseverance of the saints. I believe that those who have truly believed in Jesus Christ shall persevere to the end, and if they fall off along the way, that is the greatest of evidences that they never belonged to him. I believe in the perseverance of the saints. They shall persevere, for life given by God is divine life. It cannot die. It is the life that Jesus gave when he came out of the grave on the first day of the week on the resurrection morning. It is the life that overcomes death, and ever true believer in Jesus Christ possesses everlasting life, resurrection life, and they who possess resurrection life shall never die. I believe in the perseverance of the saints.

I also believe in the perseverance of the Savior who keeps those who have put their trust in Jesus Christ. Of course, the key question is, have you put your faith and trust in Jesus Christ?

Now, the prophet is out of the will of God, but he’s not outside the realm of the love of God. Let’s see what he does. He’s going to be given a little instruction. But he’s going to select the place, apparently. So Jonah went out of the city and sat on the east side of the city. Reluctant to accept the conversion of Nineveh, he locates in Nineveh’s Holiday Inn East [laughter].

What was in his mind? He sat down. He built himself a little booth, which apparently was something like a gazebo. It was made of lattice work, for the sun may apparently come through the lattice work. And he locates himself there, and looking out over the city of Nineveh, he perhaps thinks, I wonder if they will backslide. I wonder if we shall see returning the cruelty and brutality of Nineveh. For if it does, I shall be quick to accuse them that Israel may be delivered. And so he sits over against the city to see what becomes of the city.

Apparently the forty days have elapsed. If the forty days had not elapsed, he would have still had hope. He would have not have been so displeased or burned up. But now he’s waiting to see what has happened, and he’s going to be sent to God’s Kindergarten, so he’s going to be given a little visual aid to understanding the will of God.

So he’s sitting in his little gazebo, and we read in the 6th verse, “And the Lord God prepared a gourd and made it come up over Jonah.” Now, that is the castor oil plant apparently. That’s enough to disturb anyone, it would seem to me, bit it did not Jonah. He liked this, because that plant has great big leaves which will shade him from the rays of the sun. God made it come up over Jonah that may be a shadow over his head to deliver him from his grief. So Jonah was exceedingly glad about the gourd.

Now I’d like to, if I may, draw a few words of application from this. The purpose of all this of course is to show Jonah that his attitude toward Nineveh is wrong. But in the course of it, there are some other lessons that come through. First lesson it seems to me is that God is in our comforts. It is God who prepared the gourd, and frequently the comforts of God come when we want them and as we want them, and they are wonderful to experience. And so Jonah rejoiced in that gourd. It was God’s comfort to him.

But he did not do one thing that he should have done, it seems to me. He was very glad for the gourd, but he was not grateful to God. He did not recognize that it was God who had done this. He almost, though this is not stated, he almost lets this gourd become his God, because he has no God practically at the moment.

I think too, by the way, that Jonah must have smiled as he wrote this little verse years later and recounted his experience. God prepared a gourd that it might be a shadow over his head. So Jonah was exceedingly glad of the gourd. He describes his experience.

Then, the next thing we read is that God prepared a worm when the morning rose the next day, and smote the gourd so that it withered. It was one of those little garden

worms that get in your best plant in your garden, and you discover afterward, after it is toppled over, that it has been the object of some gnawing and boring, and so Jonah awoke hoping that that shade of the castor oil plant would protect him from the rays of the Sun, and he looked at his plant, and there it was, drooped over, and he looked down at the bottom of it, and there was a little worm that had been eating out the heart of the plant. I think of course that Jonah was reminded of his insignificance by this. Here is a lowly, gnawing, boring worm, and of course that should have been a message to him.

There is also another message in this. If God is in our comforts, he is also in our losses. Alright, so you did buy General Motors at 100, and it’s only 78 today. And so you’ve lost 2200 dollars – you felt that you were led of God to buy that security, and now you’ve lost. Well what do you do? You sit down in your little gazebo and complain? Well not if you really approach this in the right spirit to start with. Or any of the other things that happen in your life.

In the final analysis, if you have your faith and trust in Jesus Christ, they come from the hand of God. There is nothing that can come to us except it come through him first. And so the tragedies and the trials of life and the experiences of life are given to us by a loving God, and as I’ve so often said, I’m so glad I do have a loving God that he will seek to gain my attention. And so when I need a little spanking, a little disciplining, he can be counted upon to give it to me. I wouldn’t want a father who would not do that. How would you like to have a father who cared so little about you that he wasn’t anxious to discipline you? I’m speaking to the kids, now.

There is nothing more wonderful than having father who is willing to put you over his legs and give you a few paddles when you need them. That’s the sign of his love. That’s the sign he wants you to develop into something that will glorify God as well as him. And so God is in our losses.

Don’t be like the dog. When you take a dog with a stick and you begin to punish a dog, what does it do? It begins to bite the stick. [Laughter]

There was a woman who came to a spiritual adviser. She was very disappointed and unhappy, and she expressed this to her friend. And he asked her, “Have you ever read Psalm 37?”

And her face brightened and she said, “Oh yes, that’s my favorite Psalm. I know it by heart.”

He said, “What’s the first word?” He thought that she would say, “Fret not.”

But she said, “Fret.” [Laughter]

He said, “You know, that part of the Psalm is the only part that you really know by heart.” [More laughter] And then he said, “I want you to repeat the first verse, ‘Fret not thyself because of evildoers,’ and repeat it again.” And then he said, “Who’s causing you to fret?”

And then she unburdened her heart and said it’s some young man who’s causing her to fret. And when she finished, he said, “You know, that young man may be the occasion of your fretting, but you are causing yourself to fret. That text says, ‘Fret not yourself because of evildoers.’ In the final analysis, others may be the occasion of our worry, but none can cause us to fret except ourselves.

And so Jonah is sitting over opposite Nineveh, and now he’s fretting. And God is not through with the prophet yet, because he hasn’t learned his lesson. And so we read in the 8th verse, “And it came to pass, when the sun arose, that God prepared a vehement east wind; and the sun beat upon the head of Jonah” -- from which I gather that he prophet, like all great preachers, was balding [laughter]. He had no protection from the rays of the Sun.

That word, a vehement east wind, is what we would say by the term “scorcher.” The commentaries say it’s a reference to the sultry, oppressive head of the sirroco, and we learn from it that God is in our heaviest trials. It is God who has prepared the gourd. It is God who has prepared the worm. It is God who has prepared the vehement east wind.

“Troubles,” Spurgeon said, “fly in flocks like martins, but God is in control.” And he controls all the affairs of life.

Did you notice that little thing that was in our *Dallas Morning News* the other day? I saw it on down on the bulletin board at the seminary the other day. Some Oakland attorney had filed a \$100,000 damage suit against the deity for careless and negligent control of the weather. [Laughter] His legal secretary had lost some property in Arizona some nine years ago because a lightening bolt had destroyed it. And so the attorney has issued a summons for God to appear in court, and the little article went on to say that “He anticipated he would win a default judgment when the defendant failed to appear.” I’d like to say to the lawyer, whose name is Tancey, that he probably will not appear, but you probably will not be able to collect, either. [Laughter]

And furthermore, you will discover that when the time comes to an end that he’s really been here all along. And you will discover that he does appear – and he does – for he controls all of the affairs of life.

Now this is Jonah’s object lesson, but God is going to speak directly to him in the remaining verses. In the 9th verse he says, “Doest thou well to be angry for the gourd?” And he said, “I do well to be angry, even unto death.”

Then said the Lord, “Thou” – that is emphatic in the Hebrew text – “Thou hast had pity on the gourd for which thou hast not labored, neither madest it grow which came up in a night and perished in a night, and should not I” – that is emphatic in the Hebrew text – “should not I spare Nineveh, that great city in which there are six score thousands that cannot discern between their right and hand their left hand and also much cattle?”

Now what is God trying to say to Jonah? Why I think it should be rather plain. Jonah, you’ve had pity upon a gourd. As a matter of fact, you’ve felt a sense of loss because you’ve lost the gourd. Now the gourd is an inanimate creation. Furthermore, you did not create it. I am responsible for it, ultimately. Further, you did not nourish it up. It grew up of strength supplied by itself – not by you, Jonah. And furthermore, the

gourd has a temporary life at best. And so Jonah, you’ve felt a sense of loss for the inanimate, uncreated, unnourished and temporary – in fact, Jonah, you have said that you would even die because of what has happened, the sense of loss that you have.

Now I would like to say to you, Jonah, (so God says) I would like to say to you that Nineveh is not an inanimate creation; it is an animate creation. I would like to say to you that Nineveh is not something that is uncreated by you, but something that is created by me. And furthermore I would like to say to you that not have I created Nineveh, I have nourished up Nineveh. I have preserved Nineveh. And I would like to say finally to you that Nineveh, Jonah, is not an [sic., inanimate], unnourished, uncreated by you, temporary product, but it is in the final analysis an animate, created, preserved and eternal creation because each one who lives in that great city of Nineveh has a spirit that shall never die.

Now Jonah, if you have felt a sense of loss over that gourd, such a sense of loss that you have said you would like to die, how do you think that I, the great God of the universe, responsible for the 120,000 Ninevites, feels when they are lost and headed for a Christless eternity?

Furthermore, Jonah, you said that you wished to die. Now we must in our thinking move on to New Testament times for a moment. But I would like to say to you that the tremendous lack of contrast that exists between Jonah’s lack of love and God’s great love becomes understandable in the final analysis only when we realize that finally God expressed his love for his own in the gift of his Son, Jesus Christ. And so I think that from the standpoint of today, we might have put it this way: Jonah, you felt a sense of loss because of an inanimate, uncreated by you, unnourished temporary creation of God; shall I not feel a deep sense of loss and pain over the fact than an animate, created, preserved and eternal group of spirits of men who are mine have not yet come to me?

And Jonah, if you are not willing to die, may I remind you that not only am I willing to die, but in the person of my Son, Jesus Christ, I shall have the experience of the

pain of a loss of a Son because of them? And there comes through with tremendous force the love of God for his own in this great appeal at the end of the book. And there is no question but that this abrupt ending – “and much cattle” – is designed that in the love of God there is also a pity for his own animal creation.

May as I close point you to a couple of things? First of all, I don’t want to lose something that we’ve been talking about through this book, and that is, the ultimate success of God’s discipline. Someone has said, and it is true, that the word “prepared” occurs in the Book of Jonah four times. There are four prepared things.

In chapter 1, verse 17 we read, “Now the Lord had prepared a great fish.” Chapter 4 verse 6, “Now the Lord prepared a gourd.” Chapter 7, “But God prepared a worm.” And verse 8 of chapter 4, “That God prepared a vehement east wind.”

But there are really five prepared things in the Book of Jonah, and the fifth is the prophet himself. For by the experiences of life, and by penning it, he shows himself now to be an humble and spirited saint.

Really, the Book of Jonah is Jonah’s confession of how God settled his quarrel with him. He began his book by saying, “The word of the Lord came unto Jonah.” And you know, there’s a great difference between the word of God coming to a person, and the word of God piercing the heart of that person. The word of God has come to you this morning in this auditorium as I’ve referred to the gospel of the Lord Jesus, more than once.

But the word of God really only comes to us and pierces our hearts when we respond to it. And when the one of whom it speaks, Jesus Christ, becomes our personal Savior, then it has pierced our hearts. And so in Jonah’s case, the word of the Lord that came unto him finally pierced his heart, and as he penned this book, he expressed it.

Peter says that the prophets spoke as they were moved by the Holy Ghost, and Jonah, moved by the Holy Ghost, has given us this great story.

But there is another thing. I said something about the love of God for all his own, wherever they believe, even in Nineveh. He will seek them out, he will search them out, he will ultimately come to them. He will ultimately bring them to himself. Jesus said, “Other sheep I have which are not of this fold. Them also I must bring.” In the 17th chapter of the Gospel of John, before his Father, he said, “I thank Thee, Father, for those for whom Thou hast given me.” And you know, I learned this. That the love of God for those who belong to him is so irresistible – it is so irresistible that it overwhelms and uses a disobedient prophet as its instrument.

And God is so sure to bring those Ninevites to himself who belong to him, that when a stumbling prophet gets in the way, the love of God is so irresistible that God moves through this man to accomplish his perfect will, even against the will of the prophet.

What a wonderful thing it is to have a God who loves you like that.

Irresistible grace? Of course it is irresistible. And a recalcitrant prophet cannot prevent God’s accomplishing his purposes. And the Ninevites come because they were his from the beginning.

And so I say to you this morning, as an ambassador of Jesus Christ, won’t you come? Won’t you put your faith and trust in the Lord Jesus? If you wonder if you’re among his own, his people, I remind you of your need, and I remind you of the work of Jesus Christ whose death has accomplished a redemption that you may make your own by personal trust in him. There is none other name given under heaven among men whereby we must be saved.

And so I say to you this morning, come. Come to the Lord Jesus. Don’t you want to be saved? Don’t you want to have eternal life? Don’t you want to be sure that in knowing him you know him who to know is life eternal? You young people, you older ones, who so often it is hard to reach, won’t you turn to him? Come. Come. Shall we stand for the benediction?

[Prayer] We thank Thee O God for the great ministry of the prophet Jonah. We know, Lord, why this book is found in holy writ. We know how wonderful it is to have a loving God. And we pray O Father that the Holy Spirit may take of the things of Christ and show them unto those who are here who may not know him. May they sense their need. May they turn to him who has met it and take him as Savior. Give them no rest nor peace until they rest in him.

For Jesus’ sake. Amen.