

## Doubt not this Word of Salvation

### Jonah 2:1-10

Then Jonah prayed unto the LORD his God out of the fish's belly, <sup>2</sup> And said, I cried by reason of mine affliction unto the LORD, and he heard me; out of the belly of hell cried I, and thou heardest my voice. <sup>3</sup> For thou hadst cast me into the deep, in the midst of the seas; and the floods compassed me about: all thy billows and thy waves passed over me. <sup>4</sup> Then I said, I am cast out of thy sight; yet I will look again toward thy holy temple. <sup>5</sup> The waters compassed me about, even to the soul: the depth closed me round about, the weeds were wrapped about my head. <sup>6</sup> I went down to the bottoms of the mountains; the earth with her bars was about me for ever: yet hast thou brought up my life from corruption, O LORD my God. <sup>7</sup> When my soul fainted within me I remembered the LORD: and my prayer came in unto thee, into thine holy temple. <sup>8</sup> They that observe lying vanities forsake their own mercy. <sup>9</sup> But I will sacrifice unto thee with the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay that that I have vowed. Salvation is of the LORD. <sup>10</sup> And the LORD spake unto the fish, and it vomited out Jonah upon the dry land.

Dear Friends in Christ Jesus,

The Word of God bids us believe that Jesus, who was crucified and put to death, arose from His tomb on the third day. As proof, it offers the eye witness of the Apostles as the only evidence we need. In other words, the Lord bids us believe, because He said so. Aside from the Word of God, there are many other things we can point to in order to show that Jesus has rise, such as the record and logical conclusions of history, but God offers us only His Word as proof, for it is the only thing which *can absolutely* prove any matter, and that is true especially of our salvation in Christ Jesus. God's Word and other evidence are never really at odds with one another, but only God's Word is certain, for everything else is open to human interpretation. In all evidence but Scripture, we must invoke our human reason, which can easily get out of control and seek to bend the Word of God to its own notions and pride.

Men hardly need an excuse to disregard the Word of God. Thomas had seen Jesus face to face and believed on Him, yet he declared to his fellow apostles: "Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe." Many have wrongly accused Thomas of being a materialist, of not believing anything unless he had the evidence to prove it. Whether that was true of Thomas no one can tell. On the day when Thomas was told by ten other Apostles, "We have seen the Lord!" he was given all the evidence that he needed. You can hardly scoff at the fresh eye-witness of ten men who were perfectly convinced that they had seen Jesus and spoken with Him. Such testimony bears enough weight to prove almost any matter. They had truly seen the Lord. Men have

won court cases with far less.

It was not evidence that Thomas lacked, but faith. He did not believe the Word of the Lord. You see, Peter and Thomas were by no means alone. In Mark 16:14 we hear, "Afterward he appeared unto the eleven as they sat at meat, and upbraided them with their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they believed not them which had seen him after he was risen." They had no excuse. They had Jesus' own Word which had never proven false. They had the witness of the prophets. They had seen His miracles. None of these things mattered, for in the end, it was not evidence, but faith that they lacked.

And so it is today. The resurrection of Jesus has withstood the test of time, being backed by enough empirical evidence to convince any jury that, despite the seeming impossibility of it, Jesus Christ rose from the dead. None of this matters to the world, for the heart of man is such that by nature, it cannot believe the Word of God, even when that Word has been demonstrably proven. Is the external evidence which confirms the Word of God unimportant? By no means, and Christians should know it well, and be able and ready to convince those who speak against the testimony of Scripture. The truth and the Word of God are *never* at odds, and God has often worn down the stubborn resistance of the mind of man with evidence, before converting him with the Word. Nevertheless, it is often the case that the *prevailing* wisdom runs contrary to the Word of God, and contrary to the truth. Furthermore there are many things which men may discover that at first seems to contradict the Word of God, but latter proves to be false. Men will use any excuse to deny God's Word. They will remember only what denies Scripture, and ignore all that upholds it. Therefore though evidence is certainly a tool which God gives to convince men, it is not enough, and by itself it is useless. Even when uses it to contradict the lies which men believe, it is only the Word of God that can convict the heart of sin, and teach them of salvation in Christ Jesus.

Before us in our lesson, is another story that causes men to scoff, and respond with contempt and scorn. "You see," they say, "A man, swallowed by a whale, composing a Psalm. Rubbish!" Never mind that such things as a man being swallowed by a large fish, and vomited upon the shore have actually happened in modern times, and have been documented, the rules must be different when we consider the Word of God. Men cannot abide its truth, especially the truth which Jonah declares in this remarkable prayer. Nor can they tolerate the possibility that God would so arrange the history of Israel so that over and over again Jesus Christ would be foreshadowed and typified. It angers them that Jesus could point to this story, and declare, "For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and

three nights in the heart of the earth” (Matthew 12:40).

Even that such stories would appear in the written record of Israel long before Christ was born, crucified, and had risen, that every major detail of His life, and especially of His death would be described intimately centuries before He was born, offends men greatly. Once more, it is not evidence that they lack, but faith.

It was such faith that Jonah himself lacked when he fled from the faith of the Lord who ordered him to preach repentance to the people of Nineveh. Go, the Lord said. Declare my judgement to them. But Jonah would not go. He did not believe that the people of Nineveh deserved to be pardoned. Why not? Because Jonah felt superior to them. By denying them the opportunity to repent, he was as much as declaring that he, Jonah, was *worthy* of the Lord’s mercy. It was here that the faith of Jonah was shown to be deficient or lacking, for if he truly felt that he deserved mercy more than other men, then it was not mercy, but payment that he sought from the Lord. Therefore the Lord had to show Jonah what he truly deserved. So it was that by a storm, and by a whale, God humbled Jonah until he cried out the words of our lesson.

As God did so often with the words which He inspired King David to write, so it is that with these words Jonah spoke a prophecy. His words become not merely his own lament, but the lament of our Savior. Even as we gain strength and comfort from the words which our Savior spake, so it was for all the saints of old. Though Jonah could indeed cry out that the lord had brought him down low, it is only Jesus who could declare, “Out of the belly of hell, cried I, and thou heardst my voice!” Note those words. Jonah speaks in the past tense, while he was yet in the belly of the whale, of a deliverance which was already accomplished. He speaks of the belly of hell, the bottoms of the mountains, and the bars of earth which closed about him “for ever”. Far worse are these things than the belly of a whale. The Lord had delivered Jonah from the belly of hell by bringing him low, and giving him cause to consider his sins, for had Jonah continued in unrepentance, it was surely hell for Him. It was eternal damnation from which Jonah was saved by the Lord’s chastening. But as a prophet Jonah spake of Christ. How much more could our Lord Jesus declare these words in His glorious resurrection. He was there in the belly of hell, enduring their depths “for ever”. It was in the midst of that affliction that He cried out unto the Lord, “I am cast out of thy sight.” Here once more, the truth that Jesus was forsaken by the Father upon His cross. Into the grave he went, where a body would normally see corruption as it returned to dust. Not so with the body of our Lord. “I went down to the bottoms of the mountains; the earth with her bars was about me for ever: yet hast thou brought up my life from corruption, O Lord, my God.” Even so David too in prophecy declared, “For

thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption” (Psalm 16:10).

These are no doubting words. These are not the words of a man who counts his sins as a trifling matter. It was his own sins that brought upon the Lord the affliction which Jonah here declares. With these words he puts his trust in the Lord, who would bear His iniquity in hell, but be raised again and walk in the land of the living, bringing His prayer before the Lord forevermore, pleading His own death for the sins of the world.

What evidence did Jonah have when he made this confession, that the Lord would so deliver him? Only the Word of the Lord which had made the same promise to his fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. What evidence did Jesus Himself have that the Father would hear Him when He cried out upon the cross? Only that the Word of God cannot be broken. Our Lord Jesus was not faithless concerning His own resurrection, but believing, even when He was enduring the torments of hell, even when all evidence declared that He was lost, that even the Father had forsaken Him. His faith endured, and was fulfilled on the first day of the week, early in the morning, when our Saviour arose triumphant from the grave.

So too, dear Christian, should you wait on the salvation of our Lord, who will surely deliver you from every distress even as He delivered Jonah, and His own Son. Salvation is of the Lord, Jonah declared so that every generation, even the Gentiles to whom he preached, would seek it in no other place. How great indeed is the Salvation of our God, who has given us the promise of everlasting life. Our sojourn in the grave will surely be longer than three days. Yet they will seem to us to be but a fleeting moment, for when we rest in our own tombs, we will not be in hell, but in paradise, in that timeless land which knows no grief or pain, for in the presence of the Lord all grief must flee.

And then, as God is true, we shall arise and walk once more in the land of the living, and see with the eyes of our flesh that Lord whom we now know by faith. May God so give us the glorious comfort of His Son, that doubt might be ever driven from our hearts, and be replaced with the contented assurance that our Jesus liveth still. Therefore shall we also hope upon the Lord and look forward to standing before Him in His holy temple, and sacrifice unto Him with the voice of thanksgiving! Amen.