

August 28, 2016: Jonah's Ministry

Over the past few weeks we have come to know *Jonah* as a rather *peculiar* prophet. After all he experienced prior to his official visit to Nineveh, you would expect that he would *return* to Israel right away; yet, he *stays around* to see the end, the outcome of it. Who would be waiting around to see how an entire city is overturned? Then what kind of man he is who even became *angry* because the whole event fell through! Jonah can't understand why the LORD did not punish them for their wickedness, their evil ways and violence. Before we judge Jonah too harshly though, we should remember why the LORD had sent Jonah to Nineveh in the first place. Its *wickedness* had come up before the LORD! The *measure* of the LORD's longsuffering was *full*. Would we not look upon them with deep disgust *today* as well? Just compare them to the people of ISIS, Al Qaeda, and Boko Haram, and consider what *wicked deeds* they have committed over the past decades! We seek *justice* done to them, while assured also that they will face the *justice of God* eventually! Jonah had a hard time seeing this terribly wicked city *escape* its much-deserved punishment!

Let's go back to *Jonah*, dear listeners, and consider what he'd done: Jonah proclaimed the Word of the LORD, "forty more days and Nineveh will be overturned." Then he had left the city and gone to the area *east of the city*, where the mountains were most likely, so as to have a good spot to see it happen. He built himself a *shelter* there and *waited* for the LORD to come with the *judgment* he had proclaimed. Jonah knew from the books of Moses and the Psalms that the LORD is the God of *justice*; He hates evil and is terribly displeased by sin. He cannot stand the sight of it or the smell of it. Hence, we can begin to *empathize* with Jonah's sentiments. Yet, does that now *justify* his expression of it? Not at all! As we have seen last week, the proclamation of God's judgment over the wicked is not just an *OT* message; it's part and parcel of the *gospel* in old and new dispensation. Yet, this message never comes by itself, not in the OT either! God's *love* and *grace* are always part and parcel of it! Jonah knew that full well!

So what was Jonah's *problem*, dear listeners? Well, Jonah loved the LORD as the LORD of His people. God is good to *Israel*, their psalms were saying, and Jonah's message had been thus far in *Israel*. You see, and that's what Jonah didn't mind at all: that the LORD God was good and gracious, longsuffering and merciful for *Israel*. Just as Jonah was truly thankful when the LORD showed *him* this mercy and grace when He rescued *him* from the waters of the sea through the huge fish! Now, however, Jonah has come to see the LORD as just as good and gracious, longsuffering and merciful to the *Ninevites*! Were *they* His special people, did *they* deserve to be spared like Israel was, and was it not their *own* fault that their city would be overturned? That's how Jonah reasons, confronting the LORD as one who relents from calamity. Yes, he's *angry* so much that he adds to it, losing his self-control it seems, "I'd rather *die* than live with this God!" Well, the LORD then responds, "Have you any *right* to be angry?"

This question sure is a *challenge* to Jonah to make him *think more deeply* about what he has said and shown. Jonah knew the LORD as gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love; a God who relents from sending calamity..., to His *people*

Israel in Moses' days, under Jeroboam II, to whom Jonah had prophesied before. Should I, the LORD, then be different this time, when I see that this would be the end of *Nineveh*, of great and small? May I not be who I am and do with what is mine as I please? Then the LORD in His mercy for Jonah teaches him a *practical lesson*. He made a *miracle tree* come up behind his little hut. Jonah must have understood full well that this tree didn't just come up and grow there incidentally or by chance while he was sitting there as a *spectator* in his little hut. Jonah knew the LORD better than that! Again we meet the LORD, the *Maker* of heaven and earth, who in His *providential care* cast His storm on the sea, provided a huge fish, and who *here* provided a *miracle tree* first and a *worm* after, as well as a scorching wind! When Jonah woke up there was nothing yet, while in the heat of the day he can be *comfortable* in the shade under this miracle tree!

The LORD sure is good and kind, dear listeners, to Jonah and to us in many ways, even with His *unthankful* and *merciless* servant. He's like a *Father* with an unreasonable child who treats His angry child wisely by approaching him with kindness and gentleness. Be that as it may, Jonah is very *happy* with the miracle tree; which is quite remarkable, indeed, if you consider how little joy he expressed over the repentance of *Nineveh*! Jonah does have to learn a *lesson* though! So when the night fell and the dawn came, then God provided a *worm*, which chewed the vine so that it withered. So gone is the tree and gone is the shade! Yes, God also provided a *scorching east wind*, and Jonah again is so *angry* that he wants to *die* right away! How simple and silly Jonah's behaviour compares to the LORD's Almighty power and providence in this story! The LORD wasn't yet finished with Jonah though: was it *your* miracle tree or *mine*, Jonah, He asks. *I* made it grow right? It was *my* gracious gift for that one day, was it not? Now you find it so terrible that this tree is gone, because you felt so comfortable and at ease in its shade, but how does compare to *Nineveh* and its citizens?

God's judgment, His condemnation, and people's perdition: that's what Jonah was waiting for! O sure, at that time it just was the *temporary* condemnation and judgment, like an earthquake, or a famine, or the destruction due to a war; yet, that's *bad enough* as it is! Jonah doesn't have to be concerned about the Assyrians becoming God's *special* people yet. *They* won't be receiving the *promises* of the LORD at all yet at this time, the promise of the Messiah for instance. All *Nineveh* is receiving at this time is a *temporary stay of execution*; another 100 years later *Nineveh* will be destroyed as yet when God's judgment will come upon them (as we learn from the prophecy of *Nahum*). No, at this time *Nineveh* is spared a *temporal judgment*, not the *eternal* judgment; that's all Jonah was concerned with there and then.

In *our* time and day and age, we are to deal with God's *eternal* judgment! The world is heading for this judgment rapidly; the *society* has all the evidence of the *lawlessness* that makes us anticipate that day soon! Let us realize that and be aware of it when we see the people of our time and age living as they do: everyone is doing what is good in their own eyes! They propagate a *freedom* and they assume *liberties* which have been *unparalleled* in history! They're even proud of it! God's judgment cannot and will not be delayed. Hence today true believers in Jesus Christ, who are *prophets* in Him as well, must proclaim not only the *love* and *grace* of God in Jesus Christ, but *also* the seriousness

of God's impending judgment! The LORD saw Nineveh's helplessness and hopelessness, seeing how Nineveh was a city of more than *120,000 people* who didn't have a clue. In God's eyes they were all ignorant people, and should He now *destroy* them just like that, in one blow? The LORD had deep sorrow over them!

Now a *greater* than Jonah has come, dear listeners: the *Lord Jesus Christ*, and we know Him as well as one who looked upon *a city*, Jerusalem, and He *wept*! Well, this *Jesus* also said that God didn't send His Son into this world that He would *condemn* the world but that the world may be saved by Him! God so *loved* this world that he would rather give *His Son* over to be killed at the cross than that He would let this world be condemned! God's Son came into a world lost in sin and all God's wrath was poured out on *Him* and all God's condemnation struck Him and He forsook Him in the midst of it all! Why? That whosoever would believe in Him would *not perish* but have *everlasting life*! That's the message of the book of *Jonah* already, dear listeners, to show us God's grace, His longsuffering, also for the world *today*! That's the purpose also to call *you* to repentance and faith in Him, that *you* too may be *saved* from God's judgment and condemnation that's coming over this world!