

Sermon to the saints of God which are at Topeka, KS – Sunday, February 19, 2017

Part 2 of 2:

For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope. – Ro. 15:4

So, continuing from last Sunday:

1. Why, really, did Jonah initially disobey God and try to avoid the work that he had been commanded to do?

There are expositors who suggest the very notion of preaching of God's standard to the mighty, bloodthirsty and idolatrous Ninevites invited fear and trepidation, but that doesn't fully comport with the rest of the scriptural evidence here. Ostensibly, Jonah gives at least the beginning of an understanding of why he attempted to flee from the presence of the Lord, in his prayer offered in chapter 4, after the repentance of the Ninevites:

But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was very angry. And he prayed unto the LORD, and said, I pray thee, O LORD, was not this my saying, when I was yet in my country? Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish: for I knew that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil. Therefore now, O LORD, take, I beseech thee, my life from me; for it is better for me to die than to live. – Jo. 4:1-3

Why would it upset Jonah, to the point of disobeying God and fleeing before the presence of the Lord, that God was a merciful and gracious God, slow to anger and of great kindness – and that God might stay his own hand from destroying a people in their rebellion and granting them further space for repentance, in great longsuffering? Knowledge of these blessed perfect attributes of the Lord, by a sober-minded Christian, would produce such joy at being commissioned to preach in His name, with the prospects of knowing that God's will is accomplished and His name is glorified in either their repentance at His hand or in a divine stroke of justice if He wills? And isn't merely hearing of the Lord calling a soul (or group of souls) to repentance, and hearing words and seeing walks from them that seems to confirm such an event, a matter of great rejoicing? It's almost as if, by saying these things in his prayer, Jonah offers even less of a rational case for running the other way than if he had just kept his mouth shut.

Some expositors make room for the notion that, since Jonah was commissioned to merely preach certain doom to the Ninevites, that he feared being looked upon as a false prophet, should God lift His omnipotent hand from those to whom Jonah announced the doom – or

alternatively, that he even feared being pulled, limb from limb, by the first person who he cried near, as if saying to himself: "*Can I denounce ruin on this populous city, without being instantly crushed? Will not the first man that meets me stone me to death?*" The record we have of his preaching is this:

Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown. – Jo. 3:4

There is no mercy expressly given in this preaching. But by Jonah's own admission in his second prayer unto God (Jo. 4:2-3), he knew God to be full of grace, mercy and longsuffering, so he is already admitting that he knew he wasn't strictly preaching certain doom to those wicked Ninevites (and he had just experienced the salvation of the Lord, first hand, at the preparing of the great fish). We cannot understand the terseness of that preaching as the mere stating of a fact - a prophetic timestamp of certain impending doom. Jonah could not have been relating to all in Nineveh a sentiment like: "Forty days from now, you are all going to experience the wrath of God for your sin – no if's, and's or but's." Consider the scripture:

Paul, a servant of God, and an apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of God's elect, and the acknowledging of the truth which is after godliness; in hope of eternal life, WHICH GOD, THAT CANNOT LIE, promised before the world began; but hath in due times manifested his word through preaching, which is committed unto me according to the commandment of God our Saviour; - Tit. 1:1-3 (all caps mine) – And:

Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the IMMUTABILITY OF HIS COUNSEL, confirmed it by an oath: that by two immutable things, IN WHICH IT WAS IMPOSSIBLE FOR GOD TO LIE, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us: - Heb 6:17-18 (all caps mine) – And:

Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning. – James 1:17 – And:

Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth. – Ro. 9:18

If God strictly said He was going to do it, then He was going to do it! It is very difficult to build the case that Jonah's preaching was singularly a strict pronouncement of that which was fixed in God's will as to happen – namely Nineveh's overthrow.

Gill: *not exceeding such a space (of 40 days), which was granted for their repentance, which is implied, though not expressed; and must be understood with this proviso, except it repented, for otherwise why is any time fixed? And why have the warning given them, or the prophet sent to*

them? And why were they not destroyed at once, as Sodom and Gomorrah, without any notice? Doubtless, so it would have been, had not this been the case.

Poole: a very short time, some might think, for this great city; but it is more time than God was bound to give, or than they could deserve, or than God gave to Sodom and Gomorrah, the sins of which cities were no doubt found in Nineveh that now Jonah preached to. The threat is express and peremptory in its form and words; though there be a reserve with God on condition of repentance, which operated in due time, and manifestly proved that God intended mercy to **repenting** Nineveh, though he threatened an overthrow to **impenitent** Nineveh.

There was definitely something more going on here that was motivating this prophet – and Jonah’s anger at the repenting of the Ninevites, I believe, tells the tale of his initial flight when being summoned by God to do the work.

2. Why was Jonah angry at the Lord at the repenting of the Ninevites?

But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was very angry. And he prayed unto the LORD, and said, I pray thee, O LORD, was not this my saying, when I was yet in my country? Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish: for I knew that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil. Therefore now, O LORD, take, I beseech thee, my life from me; for it is better for me to die than to live. Then said the LORD, Doest thou well to be angry? – Jo. 4:1-4

Jonah had already been angry at the Lord and grieved for ‘his people’ (for he was an Hebrew) well before the repenting of the Ninevites. He despairs of the salvation of Israel, and is convulsed with great sorrow, which bursts out into words and sets forth the causes of grief, saying in a manner of speaking, ‘Am I alone chosen out of so many prophets, to announce destruction to my people through the salvation of others?’ (Remember, it was the Assyrians, of which Ninevah was the capital city, who destroyed the 10 tribe of the Northern Kingdom, within 50 years of the preaching of Jonah to Ninevah). Some think he grieved not that the multitude of nations is saved, but that such salvation is a harbinger of the perishing of Israel. He knew full well of those words of God delivered as the Song of Moses – where God’s servant warned the Hebrews of their idolatry, lust, ingratitude and turning from the Lord:

Give ear, O ye heavens, and I will speak; and hear, O earth, the words of my mouth. My doctrine shall drop as the rain, my speech shall distil as the dew, as the small rain upon the tender herb, and as the showers upon the grass: because I will publish the name of the LORD: ascribe ye greatness unto our God. He is the Rock, his work is perfect: for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he. They have corrupted

*themselves, their spot is not the spot of his children: they are a perverse and crooked generation. Do ye thus requite the LORD, O foolish people and unwise? is not he thy father that hath bought thee? hath he not made thee, and established thee? Remember the days of old, consider the years of many generations: ask thy father, and he will shew thee; thy elders, and they will tell thee. When the most High divided to the nations their inheritance, when he separated the sons of Adam, he set the bounds of the people according to the number of the children of Israel. For the LORD'S portion is his people; Jacob is the lot of his inheritance. He found him in a desert land, and in the waste howling wilderness; he led him about, he instructed him, he kept him as the apple of his eye...so the LORD alone did lead him, and there was no strange god with him...and he made him to suck honey out of the rock, and oil out of the flinty rock; butter of kine...and thou didst drink the pure blood of the grape. But Jeshurun (Israel) waxed fat, and kicked...then he forsook God which made him, and lightly esteemed the Rock of his salvation. They provoked him to jealousy with strange gods, with abominations provoked they him to anger. They sacrificed unto devils, not to God; to gods whom they knew not, to new gods that came newly up, whom your fathers feared not. Of the Rock that begat thee thou art unmindful, and hast forgotten God that formed thee. And when the LORD saw it, he abhorred them, because of the provoking of his sons, and of his daughters. And he said, I will hide my face from them, I will see what their end shall be: for they are a very froward generation, children in whom is no faith. **THEY HAVE MOVED ME TO JEALOUSY WITH THAT WHICH IS NOT GOD; THEY HAVE PROVOKED ME TO ANGER WITH THEIR VANITIES: AND I WILL MOVE THEM TO JEALOUSY WITH THOSE WHICH ARE NOT A PEOPLE; I WILL PROVOKE THEM TO ANGER WITH A FOOLISH NATION.** – Deut. 32:1-21 (all caps mine)*

Jonah knew all this that Moses had preached – and he knew the corresponding wicked, sinful condition that his people had fallen into. Jonah was jealous. Jonah was angry. And this, I submit to you, was the substantial girth of the iceberg below the water's surface for brother Jonah. This example ought to check us, that we express not too boldly our opinion respecting the doings of God, but, on the contrary, hold our thoughts captive, lest any presumption of this kind be manifested by us; Jonah's experience is to us an evidence that there is nothing more preposterous than for us to settle this or that according to our own wisdom, since it is alone true wisdom to submit ourselves wholly to the will of God.

Henry on Jo. 4:3: *What all the saints make matter of joy and praise, Jonah makes the subject of reflection upon God; as if showing mercy were an imperfection of the divine nature, which is its greatest glory. It is to his sparing, pardoning mercy, we all owe it that we are out of hell. Jonah wishes for death: this was the language of folly, passion, and strong corruption. There appeared in Jonah remains of a proud, uncharitable spirit; and that he did not desire (the repentance that*

would lead to the welfare of the Ninevites), but had only come to declare and witness their destruction (hoping God would do so). In this frame of mind, he overlooked the good of which he had been an instrument, and the glory of the divine mercy. We should often ask ourselves, Is it well to say thus, to do thus? Can I justify it? Do I well to be so soon angry, so often angry, so long angry, and to give others ill language in my anger? Do I well to be angry at the mercy of God to repenting sinners? That was Jonah's crime. Do we do well to be angry at what is for the glory of God, and the advancement of his kingdom? Let the conversion of sinners, which is the joy of heaven, be our joy, and never our grief.

Jonah, himself, offers the highest praise unto God upon the matter of the Salvation of the Lord while inside the great fish:

Then Jonah prayed unto the LORD his God out of the fish's belly, 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...yet hast thou brought up my life from corruption, O LORD my God. When my soul fainted within me I remembered the LORD: and my prayer came in unto thee, into thine holy temple. They that observe lying vanities forsake their own mercy. But I will sacrifice unto thee with the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay that that I have vowed. SALVATION IS OF THE LORD. – Jo. 2:2, 6-9 (all caps mine)

Notice the two distinct ways that Jonah prays, however: not just in words or message, but also in spirit. Compare the spirit of the above abridged prayer to what he utters in chapter 4:

But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was very angry. And he prayed unto the LORD, and said, I pray thee, O LORD, was not this my saying, when I was yet in my country? Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish: for I knew that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil. – Jo. 4:1-2

We often offer our sincerest prayer of total dependence upon the Lord when in dire affliction or trouble – it is then that we are reminded OF our TOTAL DEPENDENCE upon Him (coming unto Him as little children). In situations where we feel no personal imminent threat of trouble or hot affliction, we may have greater tendency to intermingle our flesh with proper spiritual requests, praise and thanksgiving – which has an improper net result (for our flesh has nothing to do with God's will – 'Thy will be done').

3. What does it mean that “God repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do unto them; and he did it not”?

God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good? Nu. 23:19

The Hebrew word here is *nacham* (naw-kham) – to console or comfort oneself, to be sorry, to be moved to pity, to have compassion.

Poole: *Properly God cannot repent as He puts it in the hearts of some men to repent, because he is unchangeable in his nature and counsels, and perfectly wise, and therefore not liable to any disappointment (from either His determinate counsel or without it). But this is spoken of God after the manner of man, by a common figure called anthropopathia, whereby also eyes, ears, hands, nose, &c. are ascribed to God; and it signifies an alienation of God's heart and affections from men for their wickedness, whereby God carries himself towards them like one that is truly penitent and grieved - destroying the work of his own hands.*

God says this of Himself:

For I am the LORD, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed. – Ma. 3:6

Barnes on Nu. 23:19: *The notion of repentance, in the way that we understand the concept, may seem to jar with the unchangeableness of God. To go to the root of the matter, every act of the divine will, of creative power, or of interference with the order of nature, seems to man at variance with inflexibility of purpose. It is not necessary, however, nor may God grant us full light, that we should be able to comprehend or construe to ourselves in all its practical detail that sublime harmony which subsists between the liberty and the immutability of God. That change of state which is essential to will, liberty, and activity, may be, for aught we know, and from what we know must be, in profound unison with the eternity of the divine purpose.*

4. Why did Jonah sit afar off, looking down upon the city, after they had repented of their evil?

So Jonah went out of the city, and sat on the east side of the city, and there made him a booth, and sat under it in the shadow, till he might see what would become of the city. – Jo. 4:5

After the Ninevites repented, is Jonah merely curious as to what might happen next? No. He desires their speedy relapse into sin and the following destruction. He was angry that the Lord stayed His own hand against them:

And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do unto them; and he did it not. But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was very angry. – Jo. 3:10, 4:1

Matthew Henry: *Jonah went out of the city, yet remained near at hand, as if he expected and desired its overthrow. Those who have fretful, uneasy spirits, often make troubles for themselves, that they may still have something to complain of. See how tender God is of his people in their afflictions, even though they are foolish and froward.*

Here, Jonah prefigured the carnal people of Israel – they, too, were sad at the salvation of the Ninevites (prefiguring the redemption and deliverance of the Gentiles). Christ came, calling not the righteous (in their own eyes) but sinners to repentance.

But their scribes and Pharisees murmured against his disciples, saying, Why do ye eat and drink with publicans and sinners? And Jesus answering said unto them, They that are whole (in their own eyes) need not a physician; but they that are sick. I came not to call the righteous (in their own eyes), but sinners to repentance. – Luke 5:30-32

5. What do the gourd and the worm symbolize?

And the LORD God prepared a gourd, and made it to come up over Jonah, that it might be a shadow over his head, to deliver him from his grief. So Jonah was exceeding glad of the gourd. But God prepared a worm when the morning rose the next day, and it smote the gourd that it withered. – Jo. 4:6-7

Man is giddy – fickle – pandering to the flesh – feeding our own discontentment and anger when we take our own counsel and when unchecked by right words, a provocation unto love and to good works and a right spirit.

The Lord prepared the gourd and sent it to him. *It was sent to him when he was in a very wrong spirit*, angry with God, and angry with his fellow men. Sick of everybody, and sick even of himself, he gets away into this little booth, and there, in discontent and discomfort, he sits watching to see the fate of the city lying below the hill. Yet God comforted him by preparing a gourd to be "a shadow over his head, to deliver him from his grief." The Lord had pity on Jonah when he was at his worst – with no cogent spiritual position – literally spiritually unhinged. We likely might not have so much patience or pity – but God knew Jonah's anger – that there was no righteousness in it, and comforted him in a meaningful way that men would not have thought of nor could they supply – the right thing, in the right season, and in the right measure.

Spurgeon remarks on the gourd: *Whenever you get such an invaluable blessing, praise God for it. Do not let your gourd become your god, but let your gourd lead you to your God. When our comforts become our idols, they work our ruin; but when they make us bless God for them, then they become messengers from God, which help toward our growth in grace...God has often sent us mercies that have made us exceeding glad, and we have been delivered from the pressure of heavy grief. But here is the sad note in the history of Jonah, as it has often been with us also, although he was exceeding glad, he does not appear to have been exceeding grateful. It is one thing to be glad of a mercy, it is another matter to be grateful for that mercy. Sometimes a man spends all his time in rejoicing over the comfort, which then becomes idolatry, whereas he ought*

to have expended it in thanking and praising God for the comfort, evidencing a right spirit toward God.

ALL OUR EARTHLY COMFORTS AND AFFLICTIONS ARE OF GOD'S PROVIDING, AND OUR EARTHLY COMFORTS ARE FLEETING. The great purpose of all his dealings with us is to bring us to thought about himself. "The Lord had prepared a great fish;" "The Lord prepared a gourd;" "The Lord prepared a worm;" "The Lord prepared a vehement east wind." Both blessings and afflictions, and their removal or dissipation, are at the hand of a sovereign God. As the Lord perfects His saints, He leads them more and more to seek and value spiritual comfort and contentment, even as their passion and enjoyment of earthly comforts wanes and their frames become more frail. When the worm destroyed the gourd, it was a small and unseen thing that took away Jonah's earthly comfort from him, as our earthly comforts are taken away in a moment – and we should not lean upon them or seek them in primacy – we should always see the Lord in the giving or removing of such a thing.

Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof. – Mat. 6:30-34

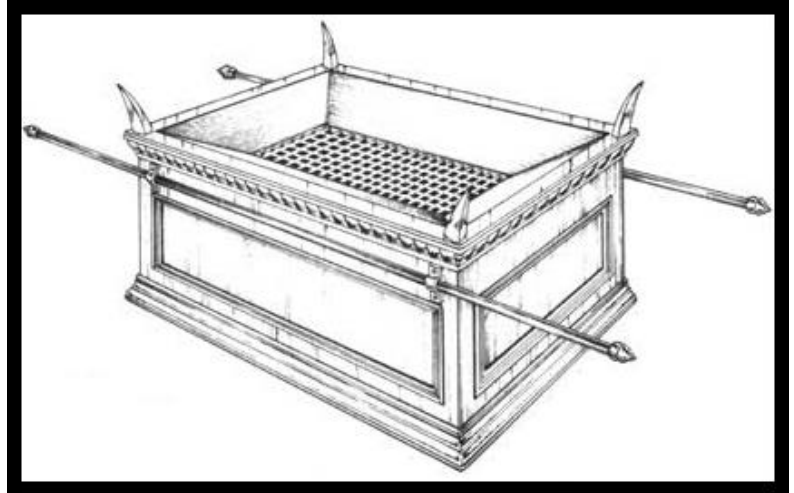
Jonah had pity for (or pitied) the destruction of the gourd, which came up in a day and was gone in a day, which he had no personal investment in (other than that it had served as a relief and comfort to him, personally), but he had no pity for a people being destroyed at the hand of God – a people so great that they had 600,000 little babies (to give you a rough idea, babies 2 years old and under comprise about 2% of the population in America, so a place with that many babies had, overall, a great population).

6. What can we learn from Jonah, as ambassadors of Christ - who are given a very similar commission to his?

It is hoped that, throughout the foregoing, there was and is something edifying and convenient for most of us here today. I'd like to point out an additional element that I think applies both to the case of Jonah, and to ours:

God is the LORD, which hath shewed us light: bind the sacrifice with cords, even unto the horns of the altar. – Ps. 118:27

I will leave for another day how these two seemingly disparate clauses coalesce into this marvelous verse that speaks to a rather unified concept – today focusing on the second clause. The horns of the altar are the four protrusions, at the corners of the altar, to which the sacrifice is bound with cords, that it not move, flee or jostle during the sacrifice (see image).



The primary import is of course that of a Messianic prophecy – Christ is meant. However, there is something there for us, in our walk, that Philpot asks us to consider: *What are the cords which bind the sacrifice?*

*What binds a sinner to the cross of Jesus? One cord thrown round his tender conscience and broken heart, is the strong cord of **necessity**, or faith - working through and with necessity that he cannot do without the cross, that his conscience is guilty and needs to be purged with the blood of sprinkling, that he is lost and needs to be saved, that he is afar off and needs to be brought near, that he is a ruined wretch who needs a manifestation of mercy to his trembling heart. As the apostle says, "Necessity is laid upon me," so necessity is laid upon the child of God to cleave to the cross, a strong conviction that from the cross alone comes the blood of sprinkling, which "speaks better things than the blood of Abel."*

*Christ has, in some degree, endeared Himself as a bleeding, agonizing Savior to everyone to whom He has in any way discovered Himself; and, therefore, the strong cord of love and **affection** is more or less powerfully wreathed round the tender spirit and broken heart, and by that it is attached to the horns of the altar. There is a preciousness in His **blood**, there is a beauty in His **Person**, though more marred than the sons of men; there is that **secret loveliness** in Him which wins and attracts and draws out the tender affections of the soul; and thus this cord of love twined round the heart binds it to the horns of the altar, to keep it fast and firm to the cross of the Lord Jesus.*

To proclaim: "Bind the sacrifice with cords even unto the horns of the altar," implies that the victim needed to be bound. Why was the victim bound literally? The victim was bound to the horns of the altar that it might not escape—that it might not get away, but that it might bleed and die upon the spot. There is in the children of God a struggling, a shrinking, a flying back from

the suffering which is to be endured, an endeavoring to break away, if it were possible, from the cross to which they are attached. Who would not willingly escape convictions? Who would not evade the pangs of guilt? Who would willingly wade through seas of trouble? Who would groan and sigh under a body of sin and death? Who would smart under wounds that "stench and are corrupt because of his foolishness?" Nature shrinks from it! The flesh abhors it! The carnal mind will have none of it! And, therefore, the strong cord of (irresistible grace) is wreathed round the soul that it may not get away from the cross.

Are we not continually, my friends, trying to find out some smooth flowery path in which to walk? Are we not in various ways seeking to evade and escape from trouble, sorrow, and difficulty, and endeavoring to chalk out a pleasanter, easier road? Yes, continually! Our flesh wants to get away from the painful cross, we would gladly find some easier path in which to walk! But conviction, guilt, fear, and condemnation (the fear of the Lord and the supernatural conviction in our hearts of our sin), lying as a heavy load upon the conscience, bind us to the horns of the altar, as knowing that only so far as we are attached to that altar, do we derive any efficacy in our souls from the sacrifice that was once offered upon that altar. Our flesh wants to break free from the altar – to flee. Only God-given faith and the mysterious working of the Holy Spirit of God finally binds us to the cross.

There is a case that occurs to gracious people sometimes. They have had a good experience; they have been favored with some testimony from God to the pardon of their sins; they have had some visitation of God's love in their consciences. When the savor of this has been lost, and no fresh trials come, they often get into a smooth easy path. The Lord allows them for a while to walk in this path, and they retain their past confidence, they stand in their old experience, and thus they secretly get away from the cross, holding now in the hand of 'nature' what they once held in the hand of 'grace', maintaining in 'creature strength' that which can only be really maintained by the Spirit of God in them. Thus by getting away from the cross in suffering, they get away from the cross in spiritual manifestation; and stand in the letter of their old experience, not in the sweet renewings of the Holy Spirit.

But in thus getting away from the cross they become sometimes light, trifling, frivolous, proud, presumptuous, worldly, covetous, high-minded. And why? Because they are not exercised in their souls, because they are not tried and tempted in their minds, because sin and guilt is no burden to them, and because the Lord allows them for a while to walk in a way of their own devising. But he whom God is pleased to instruct by His blessed Spirit day by day, can never long get away from the cross. His carnal nature shrinks from it, but the Lord so leads him into those paths which are connected with the cross of Christ, so that he is afraid, in his right mind, to get away from the cross, feeling that the moment he loses sight of the cross he falls into guilt and condemnation.

*But further - he who is bound to the horns of the altar has **many sacrifices** to make. He who will walk in the path which God has chosen for him will have to meet with every opposition to his walking therein. Infidelity, unbelief, rebellion, peevishness, impatience, the assaults of Satan as an angel of darkness, the delusions of Satan as an angel of light, false friends, secret or open foes, the flattery of professors, and often the frowns of God's children, the loss of worldly interests, the sacrifice of property—all these things are entailed upon him that will walk in the strait and narrow path that leads to eternal life. They are all connected with the cross of Christ, and cannot be escaped by him who is bound to the horns of the altar. Nature, therefore, shrinks back. It finds the struggle too great; it feels the sacrifices of such a kind that it cannot consent that those sacrifices should be undergone.*

Jonah fled from the presence of the Lord in his flesh, and feared Him in his spirit. He was angered at the Lord at the prospect of Ninevah's repentance in his flesh, but was grieved at the impending chastening of backslidden Israel in his spirit. While none of us can shake the flesh, we must not sow to it – we must sow to the spirit, and that starts with total trust in the Lord and His remedies, and not leaning upon our own understanding.

7. What really is the 'sign of the prophet Jonas' that Christ spoke of giving to an evil and adulterous generation, and what are we supposed to do with that understanding?

Then certain of the scribes and of the Pharisees answered, saying, Master, we would see a sign from thee. But he answered and said unto them, An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas. For as Jonas 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. The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here. – Matt. 12:38-41

What did they want a sign OF? Not just a sign, as in a miracle that showed Christ's power (which was sometimes meant), as they had already witnessed some of them, and had blasphemously ascribed such power to Beelzebub earlier in the same conversation with Christ:

Then was brought unto him one possessed with a devil, blind, and dumb: and he healed him, insomuch that the blind and dumb both spake and saw. And all the people were amazed, and said, Is not this the son of David? But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, This fellow doth not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub the prince of the devils. – Matt. 12:22-24

But rather, they implied wanting a sign from heaven that would confirm that Christ was who he claimed to be – they would see a proof that he was the very Christ (though not believing he could produce it – not being given hearts to believing on Him). Christ proclaims the following:

1. You're gonna get what I have purposed for you to get, both temporally and eternally.
2. Jonah was in the whale's belly for 3 days and nights (the whale's belly prefiguring the heart of the earth that Christ would inhabit for 3 days and nights).
3. The men of Ninevah shall rise in judgment, condemning this generation – for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and a greater than Jonah (Christ) was then amongst them - and who had already begun preaching repentance to them. The preaching of Jonah prefigured Christ preaching repentance to the Jews.

From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. – Matt. 4:17

This was the FIRST preaching we have record of Christ doing, btw, after being led up into the wilderness by the Spirit and tempted of Satan.

The sign that Christ is who He said He was, was His death, burial and resurrection. It is finished. Salvation is secured for all for whom it was meant! The last words of Jonah's prayer unto the Lord from the whale's belly were: ***Salvation is of the Lord!*** This is the sign that an evil and adulterous generation will be given. And since this sign proves Christ is who He said He was, all His preaching to them becomes a sign to them, as well – having been preached to by very Christ! The sign to this generation?

Repent! For the Kingdom of heaven is at hand, and Salvation is (ONLY) of the Lord!

I love you all.