



1 But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was very angry. 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: for I knew that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil. 3 Therefore now, O LORD, take, I beseech thee, my life from me; for it is better for me to die than to live. 4 Then said the LORD, Doest thou well to be angry? 5 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. 6 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. 7 But God prepared a worm when the morning rose the next day, and it smote the gourd that it withered. 8 And it came to pass, when the sun did arise, that God prepared a vehement east wind; and the sun beat upon the head of Jonah, that he fainted, and wished in himself to die, and said, It is better for me to die than to live. 9 And God said to Jonah, Doest thou well to be angry for the gourd? And he said, I do well to be angry, even unto death. 10 Then said the LORD, Thou hast had pity on the gourd, for the which thou hast not laboured, neither madest it grow; which came up in a night, and perished in a night: 11 And should not I spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than sixscore thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle? (Jonah 4:1-11)

Jonah has finally submitted, seemingly in full compliance, with the Word of the Lord and gone and preached God's Word to the people of Nineveh. The King has commanded a fast and has set the example in fasting and repentance. In view of the national repentance of Nineveh, the Lord has relented to send harsh judgment upon the city. One would expect a man of God to rejoice over such a response to his preach, but not Jonah! He has not completely renounced his rebellious spirit and is grieved at the

turning to God of the people of Nineveh. 1 *“But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was very angry.”* This is a profoundly disappointing attitude for a prophet of the Lord to take – to be displeased with that which pleases the Lord. It reveals a residual prideful and spiritual arrogance which is unbecoming the heart of a prophet, or even a believer, of God and His Word. Jonah was angrier with the Lord than he was of the people of that great city of Nineveh. Jealousy generates hate and is most sinful. It derives from a heart filled with spiritual arrogance and self-will. Though Jonah himself may have perished in the city at the coming judgment of God against it had it not repented, his jealousy was stronger than even his will to live and serve God in future years. This is most troubling of a prophet. It demonstrates that repentance was as much needed by Jonah as it was for the people of Nineveh. One cannot come to God in repentance while yet harboring some resentment of His Will. Complete surrender is the standard, but Jonah’s surrender was 'conditional' which is not surrender at all.

Observe the strange and unbecoming prayer of Jonah: 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: for I knew that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil. 3 Therefore now, O LORD, take, I beseech thee, my life from me; for it is better for me to die than to live.”* Jonah is saying to the Lord, *“See, I was right all along! I was justified to flee to Tarshish because I KNEW you would act in this way.”* Yes, Jonah knew the Lord was gracious and merciful and this, Jonah, considers a great weakness in the Lord. In Jonah’s eyes, the very KINDNESS that opens the floodgates of His mercy is God’s greatest fault. How atrocious and shocking of a man of God! Jonah, in his own mind, has been right all along, and God has been wrong. It seems that it is Jonah who has failed to grasp the need for repentance even more than that of the people of Nineveh. Jesus told a wicked and adulterous generation: *“Physician, heal thyself!”* (Luke 4:24) How many ministers CRY DOWN to the people every Sunday, and not OUT to them, heeding the double edged Sword of the Word of God to cut BOTH ways? This is the first prayer of record given by Jonah since praying from the belly of the fish. He certainly was not desirous of death at that time but, rather, salvation! Jonah considers death a better option than living to preach the Word of the Lord with which he does not agree.

It is amazing to me that God continues to care for and labor with Jonah, but He does! It is certain that God sees in the hearts of men things which are hidden to our own understanding. Something in Jonah’s heart was worth salvaging. Perhaps God approved of Jonah’s persistent nature even if he was in the wrong. God had gone out on the sea to retrieve Jonah from his rebellious spirit. He had even made a great fish to swallow Jonah and to take him to the depths of despair. He had resurrected Jonah from a watery grave and had given Him the privilege, yet again, of preaching His Word to the people of Nineveh. Now, once more, Jonah disagrees with the Lord. This will not do, friends. It saddens my heart to observe today many minister, doubtlessly called by God, preach things contrary to the very Word they were sent out to preach. They preach from their own opinions rather than the sure truth of God.

Praying out of unmitigated anger never suffices. The Word of the Lord, preached by Jonah, has resulted in the repentance of more than 120,000 souls (verse 11) yet Jonah is angry with the Lord for this tremendously inspiring result! Now, like a resentful child, Jonah prays for the Lord to take his own life at the repentance of multitudes! Where are the rationale and the logic of such a prayer? Does not our unjustified anger lead us to have thoughts that are senseless and ungodly? Of course, there is anger that is justified such as that against an enemy that is ungodly and wicked; however, from

whence does that anger arise over a people that repent before the Lord? It is a 'death wish!' Still, the Spirit of the Lord contends with the ungodly disposition of His prophet.

Surprisingly, the Lord answers Jonah's ridiculous prayer but not in the manner Jonah desires. 4 "Then said the LORD, Doest thou well to be angry?" It is strangely tragic that Jonah cannot see his own sin in rebelling against God, but sees great sin in a people who hear the Word of the Lord, respond to it, and turn from their wicked ways. We pray often for OUR wills to be done, but do not wait around to hear the response of the Lord of His own Will and answer to our prayer. God answered Jonah's prayer, but, again, Jonah disagrees with the answer. He persists in his hope that the Lord will destroy a city of multitudes that has repented. 5 "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."

Truly, Jonah is not in his right mind, for the right mind of the prophet is not only to preach the Word of the Lord, but to believe and do it as well. God, in His tender mercy, would like, I believe, bless Jonah for at least finally obeying and carrying His Word to this great city. But Jonah blocks all possibility of blessing by his obstinate and rebellious attitude. It is true in the life of every Christian that we often disagree with God – perhaps not in word, but by our deed; the way we respond to His Counsel; and the joy (or lack thereof) with which we obey. So the gates of mercy are stayed, not by God, but by our own spirits. Patriotism is a great strength except when love of country supersedes a love for the Word of God. May I remind the reader that there was no lack of patriotism in the ruthless regime of Nazi Germany, of Revolutionary France, or of Mao's China. Our allegiance is always first to God. If the allegiance of our country is also to God, what a happy and blessed state of affairs for our land. God will surely bless such a nation.

6 "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." God demonstrates His mercy toward Jonah in sending the gourd to shade him from the relentless Middle Eastern sun. Jonah was quite happy about the gourd, but continued to await the destruction of Nineveh. The Lord, with great mercy, was trying to assuage the grief of His prophet by showing mercy where mercy was not deserved (it never is). There would be a lesson for Jonah in the gourd. When we do not get the answer we seek from the Lord in prayer, God often sends other blessings to dissuade us from our self-wills and convert us to acceptance of His better will for our lives.

Jealousy and malice is a canker worm that eats at the heart of man. It will consume the only remnants of good will that may exist in our hearts. 7 "But God prepared a worm when the morning rose the next day, and it smote the gourd that it withered." God has made many preparations for the good of Jonah which, at the time, appeared to Jonah as hurtful curses. He prepared, first of all, a great fish to swallow Jonah to bring him back from his journey of fleeing from the Lord's Presence. He now prepares a worm to consume the only pleasure that Jonah presently enjoys in his anger. The worm eats the gourd just as the worm of jealousy eats away at our hearts, and brings misery upon misery. God will attempt to appease at times based on our past devotion and service, but His Spirit will not contend forever with the spirit of man, especially if that is a rebellious spirit.

If we remain obstinate in our hearts, God will not only remove our blessings, but will send trials and tribulations in their stead. 8 "And it came to pass, when the sun did

arise, that God prepared a vehement east wind; and the sun beat upon the head of Jonah, that he fainted, and wished in himself to die, and said, It is better for me to die than to live." I have witnessed these sudden winds (Shamal) in neighboring Iran. They arise in a moment and build into destroying sandstorms that will burn the hide from any exposed to them. If the shadowing gourd will not appease the anger of Jonah, perhaps the blistering wind will do so. Jonah now sinks to the same depths of despair that he had known in the belly of the great fish. His soul faints within him. He is even more willful in his resentment and anger at God than before the ordeal at sea. What a sad commentary. Jonah would rather die than to abide the will of God. That is exactly what happens to the unrepentant sinner. If he rejects God and will not come to Him in the sackcloth and ashes of true repentance, he will surely die the eternal death!

9 "And God said to Jonah, Doest thou well to be angry for the gourd? And he said, I do well to be angry, even unto death." You will see here that our unrighteous anger does not abate, but grows to cover even things that are inanimate. Jonah was first angry at the Lord for sending him to Nineveh. He was later angry with the Lord for showing mercy on Nineveh, and, now, he is angry for the Lord taking away the gourd that was a gift of God in the first place. "The Lord giveth, and the Lord taketh away. Blessed be the name of the Lord." You will see that Job was far more righteous than Jonah in his travail: "Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD. 22 In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly." (Job 1:21-22)

10 Then said the LORD, Thou hast had pity on the gourd, for the which thou hast not laboured, neither madest it grow; which came up in a night, and perished in a night: 11 And should not I spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than sixscore thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle?" "Look, Jonah," God is saying: "You regret the dying of the gourd for which you took pity for your benefit's sake. It is a thing only. It came up in one night and disappeared the next. Why take pity only on those things that personally profit?" That is like unto earthly riches that are so temporary as to be subject to loss daily. Why not place our hope in a city not made with hands rather than an unjustified false pride and patriotism in a city such as Jerusalem that is, indeed, made with hands? Jonah sacrificed nothing for the gourd. It was a gift of the Lord. But the Lord will have an end, sooner or later, to our stubborn rejection of His will. Jonah had not labored for the gourd whose demise he lamented, but he HAD labored for Nineveh to whom he had preached by commandment of God. Yet, for the most trivial had he pity, and for the most enduring (saving of souls) he took no pity at all. God says, "You, Jonah, have known me from the early days of your youth even if you have finally rebelled; yet, these people of Nineveh, though great sinners, have not had the blessing of knowing me in times past. They now know me and come to me with hearts of repentance. Does it make sense for you to be angry over these things?"

Here, the story of Jonah ends for us. It ends in the ephemeral mystery of God. I say 'ephemeral' because these mysteries will not abide in eternity. They are mysteries to us in this mortal body. But in Eternity, all mystery shall fade away. God Himself shall teach us of the end of Jonah's story – whether the prophet repented, or carried his rebellion with him to the grave. There is a cute little story I once read about a young devoted Christian girl in the fifth grade who believed every Word she read from God's Holy Word. As chance would have it, she had a teacher who was a proud atheist and who publicly ridiculed the girl, as often as opportunity presented, for her faith. One day in class, the teacher asked the young lady if she really believed a 'big fish' swallowed Jonah to which the girl responded, "Yes, I do so believe. That is what God says

happened, and I believe it!" "Well," smiled the teacher, "How do you suppose Jonah survived in a fish's belly for three days and three nights?" In humble faith, the girl replied, "I don't know, sir. When I get to heaven, I will just have to ask Jonah." But," said the teacher, "Suppose when you get to heaven, Jonah is not there?" With a pretty smile, the little girl said, "Oh, in THAT case, I guess YOU will have to ask him!"

The story of Jonah is one of a bigoted Jewish prophet who wished to hoard the mercies of God to himself and his own people only, and close the gates of mercy on mankind outside. The temporary delay of God (some one hundred years) in destroying Nineveh proves that God's forgiving mercy is available to all who repent – both Jew and Gentile alike. It also illustrates the wonder of the death, burial, and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ to accomplish that which no man such as Jonah could accomplish in "*three days and three nights.*" (Matthew 12:40) Though the story of Jonah is a type of Christ, it shows that the righteousness of the type (man) always falls dismally short of its fulfillment in the Lord Jesus Christ who took no resentment, but rather joy, at the conversion of sinners whom He purchased with His own blood.

Let us not trouble ourselves over the mysteries of God in this life. Simply obey orders without question as a good soldier and, when we get beyond Jordan's waters, we will have the privilege to ask our Lord Jesus Christ, face-to-face, the questions that intrigue us in this life.