

PREVENTING GRACE NO. 2924

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“And David said to Abigail, Blessed is the Lord God of Israel, who sent you this day to meet me, and blessed is your advice, and blessed are you, because you have kept me this day from coming to bloodshed, and from avenging myself with my own hand.”
1 Samuel 25:32, 33.

I MUST tell you the story, for if you do not realize the circumstances, you will not understand these words. David was in the position of an outlaw in his county. He knew that he was one day to be king over Israel, but he had such reverence for Saul, the Lord's anointed, that he would do nothing that would look like usurpation, or seem in any way to injure the reigning monarch. Some 400 restless spirits who had been impoverished by the tyrannical government of Saul, persons who were in debt and generally discontented, came to him in the caves of Adullam and there formed an army of freebooters of which David was the head. A little while afterwards, 200 others, men like-minded, came and united themselves with this force so that David found himself at the head of an army of 600 men of war, all of them valiant men, ready for exploits. You will see he was in a very difficult position—he must find work for these men. They were soldiers of fortune and they must be employed, yet it was impossible for him to act like a traitor—he would not lead his men against his king. He would not begin a revolution in order to provide for his followers.

What, then, must he do if he desired to still be loyal to the king and, at the same time, not to disband his men? He occupied his forces in peacefully guarding the herds of the great sheep-masters who fed their flocks on the high steeps of Carmel. This is not a thing uncommon in the East even today. Certain sheikhs, with their body of followers, sometimes undertake to keep off the Bedouin Arabs and other marauders who attack the flocks of the sheep-master and, of course, they expect to have some kind of remuneration for their trouble.

Now, all through the time that the sheep were in the pasture, David and his men watched over the flocks of a certain sheep-master called Nabal. When the time came round for shearing the flocks, David sent some of his followers to Nabal, to the feast of sheep shearing, presenting his request that some contribution might be sent for the support of his men on account of their having taken care of Nabal's flocks which otherwise would certainly have been diminished by systematic plunder. But Nabal had got all the good he wanted from David and he refrained not from answering David's messenger in a most rude, surly manner. “There are many servants,” he said, “now-a-days, that break away, every man, from his master. Shall I then take my bread and my water, and my flesh that I have killed for my shearers, and give it unto men whom I know not where they are?”

Such a churlish message could not fail to nettle David. Indeed, we know that it stung him to the quick. He had not run away from his master, but his master had driven him away and, as one who was apart from Saul, but yet was not Saul's antagonist, he was doing the best he could to maintain the peace. His blood boiled over. “Have I guarded the flocks of this miserable wretch,” he said, “all this time, and kept my men there merely to attend his sheep, when they might have been profitable at some other work? And now, when I send to him, instead of giving me a donation, he answers me in this churlish manner!” Then, turning to his men, he said, “Gird you on, every man, his sword, we will show this fellow how to treat us.” So, leaving 200 men to guard the caves, 400 marched out, David at the head, his hot blood all ablaze within him, his anger showing in his face. “God do so to me,” he said, “and more, also, if I leave so much as a dog of that man's house alive by the morning light!” He sallied forth doubtless with the full intent to destroy Nabal, to make his house a heap of ruins and then to devastate the sheep-master's estate! What a false position for a child of

God! But David was naturally impulsive and somehow men that have any life in them do sometimes get their tempers aroused. We hear of some people that are as quiet and as peaceful and as easy as a pond of stagnant water—certainly their peace does not flow like a river, and their righteousness is never lashed to fury like the waves of the sea. David was not one of these.

As the son of Jesse rashly pursues the man of Mount Carmel, he meets a woman, Nabal's wife. Perhaps a hard thought comes over him to smite her, but no—she is a woman—David cannot strike her! And, what is more, she is at his feet, asking him to lay all the blame at her door. Then she goes on to tell him that her husband is a very foolish and churlish man and she hopes David will not take offense at his words. She has brought him a present and she tells him that when he shall come to be king, it will be a great ease to his mind to think he never fought his own battles, but only the Lord's. She reminds him of the future and so she makes him forget the present. After a while his heart yields to quiet reflections—he acts rather as a saint than as a soldier, putting up his sword into the sheath and leaving the matter with his God. Righteous vengeance was soon asserted, when barbarous revenge was stopped, for ten days afterwards Nabal died. The Lord Himself dealt out retributive justice to the adversary, while the Lord's servant was held back from indiscriminate slaughter.

That is all we shall have occasion to say about the narrative. It suggests our subject, which is “Preventing Grace”—the Grace which God sends to prevent saints and sinners from running into sin. I hope before the service is over many of us, in looking back upon our past lives, will gratefully bless the Lord—bless His Providence and bless the man or the woman whom He has sent to teach us and to keep us back from evil—that we shall thank Him because we have oftentimes been turned back from doing the wrong thing and by an overruling counsel been led of Him in the paths of righteousness.

Of this preventing Grace we shall speak in two ways. We will deal first of all with the people of God and with them but briefly, though they are the only persons who will ever be able to recognize the value and feel thankfulness for this precious benefit. Then we shall see how Grace often prevents even men who are *not* followers of Jesus.

I. PREVENTING GRACE IS ENJOYED BY ALL THE PEOPLE OF GOD.

Dear Friends, some of us can bless God at this hour that preventing Grace came to us in the shape of a *godly education*. We heard no blasphemies when we lay in the cradle, no curses startled us from our dreams. Many of us saw no drunkenness beneath the roof of our father's house, no vulgar books were put in our way. Many of you were trained from your youth up to know the Scriptures like Timothy—and some of you have even heard something of the voice of God speaking to you as He did to Samuel. Blessed be God for a holy mother! Blessed be God for an affectionate, prayerful father! Blessed be you of the Lord, you that brought us forth for God and blessed is your advice, for you have kept us from many a sin!

Since then, preventing Grace has come in the shape of godly associations. We need, none of us, to be very proud of what we are if we think what we might have been had we been put in other positions! If, instead of being bound apprentice to a good master and afterwards brought into association with religious people in the Sunday school, in the Bible Class and in the congregation, your lot had been thrown where you could pick up your education in the street and take your college degree in the coal-hole or the theater—who can tell but you had been as black a sinner as those whom you now pass by in the street, wondering that they are so vile? Much of a man's character comes from other men. What we are is not all of ourselves. We are deep in debt to others. Indeed, what man is there upon whom there have not been a hundred fingers to mold him and a thousand influences to make his plastic character what it is? I know that the Grace of God is a thing that makes a man right before God, but I know, also, that holy associations (or ever Grace comes into our heart to renew us) prevent us from indulging in sins into which, under other circumstances, we should certainly have plunged!

In extolling preventing Grace, what shall I say, dear Friends, besides this, of the *Providential circumstances* which have kept us from sin? There have been times with some of us in our younger days before we knew Christ, when the temptation was very strong, but the opportunity was not near. And at other times the opportunity has been before our eyes, but there was no temptation. God help the man that has the temptation and the opportunity at the same time! Many and many a man has received the preventing and restraining Grace of God when the devil has been hindered from throwing the two dice at one time. It is of Grace that at one time there has been the fire in the heart, but no fuel, while at

another there has been the fuel but the fire did not burn just at that time so as to make it convenient or desirable for the man to sin. Oh, Friends, the river of our life has been winding and tortuous in its course! Had it wound in another way, it had been very different from what it is and, perhaps, a word—as we say, “an accident,” a chance hit—may have turned the whole of it! Now we can say that our moral reputation is unblemished, whereas otherwise we should have had to lament that we had been immoral, debauched and depraved if it had not been for this preventing Grace of God working through Providential circumstances.

There is a fountain which is the father of two rivers and these two rivers both take their rise in a lake at the top of a hill. Both rivers start from the same place, but when they end their course they are some five hundred miles apart. Behold this drop of water! There it lies. Which way shall it go? Shall it go down that stream and find its way to yonder sea, or down this stream to another destiny? It needs but a motion of a bird’s wing to move that drop either way and it shall go rolling onward into yonder sea, or it shall find another channel and pursue its course far apart. So has it been with us. The Grace of God—preventing Grace had much to do with the Providence which puts us in such-and-such a channel instead of casting us into another that allowed us to come into contact with holy people rather than to emaciate us with the vilest of the vile! This is a hard blow at our self-righteousness. If we had not had our hearts changed and if Providential circumstances had been a little different, we might have been lost before now.

But besides the power of conversion to change life, how much Believers owe to the Grace of God exercised through *trial and suffering!* They would have gone astray, but they were barred down by affliction. They would have leaped the hedges of God’s Law, but they were clogged by some adversity. Some men owe much to the fact that they were never in good health. A blind eye, or a crippled leg, or a maimed arm may have been in the hands of God a great blessing in keeping some of you back from iniquities in which otherwise you might have indulged! We never know what innumerable streams of good flow from that well which we call Marah, but which God often makes to be an Elim to our souls—

*“Determined to save He watched over my path,
When, Satan’s blind slave, I sported with death.”*

I suppose, dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ, that in looking back you can say, “I can see the finger of God in a great many places where I might have ruined myself—there, and there, and there—though I knew Him not, His arms were underneath me. He guided me with His eyes. He led me by His right hand that I might not be utterly destroyed.”

Now, Christian, if you would think of this a little, *you would be very grateful, indeed, to God for this.* I know if you had sinned even more, the blood of Christ could wash your guilt away—and if your iniquities had been still greater, you would not have overreached the power of Divine Love. But think now how good it is for you that you were not allowed—I speak, of course, only to some of you—to go so far! How much sorrow you have been spared! From what evil habits have you been saved! What temptations are now kept away from you which, if God had not kept you back from sin in former days, might otherwise had overwhelmed you!

Perhaps there is a man here who is a Christian and though he knows he is redeemed, he would give his right arm if he could forget his unregenerate days. There are some men who might say, “I would give my eyes if I could forget what they have seen, and lose my ears if I could remember no more what they have heard.” Why, there is a snatch of an old song that will come over you when you are in prayer! And when you are trying to get right up to Heaven there is some old black remembrance of the merriment or dissipation of the former days that checks your flight and is as a clog to the eagle and will not let it mount! There is many a man who might have been a leader in God’s camp who is afraid to come out and who, if he had come out, would have but little force because of the weakness some old habit has brought upon him. He feels he cannot do what he would for Christ because of the past. If this to not your experience, then thank God for preventing Grace!

I preached this morning to the chief of sinners, I was glad to do it, but whenever I do, I find some who wish they had been greater sinners—not because they love sin, but because they think they would then see a greater change in themselves when the Grace of God lays hold of them. Instead of this, thank God most devoutly you are big enough sinners as you are. There is enough of vileness and corruption. There is enough of base depravity. There is enough of abominable sin in you now! Thank God if you have not been allowed to give vent to the evil within you and run to an excess of riot. I write every day among my mercies that I was taught to run in wisdom’s way.

But, once again, dear Friend, if you have not been permitted to run into outrageous folly, *do not think that you are any nearer Christ because of this*. Do not imagine that you are to be saved in any different way from the most outrageous drunk or the most depraved of harlots! There is the same way to Heaven for you who are highly esteemed among men as for the man who lies rotting in a jail for his crime. I tell you, Sirs, you who think you have done no wrong, you must go to Heaven by the blood and righteousness of Christ as much as the convict at the hulks! And when you get to Glory you shall have no more right to boast of your own merits or your own goodness than the thief who went from the cross to Glory, or that woman that was a sinner and loved much because she was much forgiven! “Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid.” And while it is cause for congratulation that you may not have wandered so far into sin as others, it is also cause for trembling, for verily I say unto you, publicans and harlots often enter the Kingdom of Heaven before Pharisees! Some who were the vilest of the vile have come to Christ—have penitently accepted His righteousness while others robed in their own righteousness have gone down to Hell and perished with a double destruction with the rags of their righteousness about them!

I hope I have in no way whatever said anything which on the one hand detracts from the value of an early religious training and preventing Grace, nor anything on the other hand which detracts from the Grace which saves the very vilest of the vile. I feel that sometimes when we are preaching, we seem to look after the scum and the riffraff and we forget many others. I would not forget one of you, my dear Hearers, who hear me Sabbath after Sabbath. God is my Witness, if I thought I had missed any one of you I would be too glad to preach a sermon only for that one person, if I might but win his soul. What did I say? Preach a sermon? I would preach 50 sermons! I would preach my whole life but to win one of you and think myself well paid with such a blessed reward for such easy toil. But whether you are great sinners or little sinners outwardly, remember you are all vile in the inner nature—and the same Grace is presented to you all. “Whoever will, let him take of the waster of life freely.”

II. The second part of our discourse is to be addressed to those who as yet have not experienced the Grace of God in its constraining and quickening power. They, too, in a very real sense have received the preventing Grace of God, for **THE PREVENTING GRACE OF GOD IS UNIVERSAL.**

Without the preventing Grace of God to restrain man, he would be unbearable, and if it were not for the preventing Grace of God in society, a nation would be an impossibility, and a well-ordered commonwealth would be a thing for which we might long, but should never be able to realize. Men would be little better, we believe, than the beasts of the forest, tearing and devouring one another if the Grace of God did not keep them in check. And this, I think, is proved by the fact that the further you recede from the Light of the Gospel—the further you get from the agencies which preventing Grace is most likely to use—the more cruel and savage men are toward each other. I thank God that this is a land where preventing Grace is felt even by the very worst. I do not believe there is a burglar or a murderer but has been the subject of it, but has had to strive against it and against his own conscience before he could consummate his crime and give himself up to iniquity. You have had preventing Grace keeping you back from sin. Sinner, if *you* cannot thank God for this, *we* can! We bless the Lord that He restrains you and does not permit you to be worse than you are. We pray that this preventing Grace may never be taken from you, or else you shall be like some wild horse that has desired to dash over the precipice, who, when the rein is laid upon his neck, leaps to his doom and destroys himself and as many as are attached to him.

Yet, while it is universal, *this preventing Grace of God is much detested and abhorred by some men*. Some can hardly tolerate the restrictions which Christianity has imposed upon the nation! They are vexed that they have to shut up shop on Sunday and, by a sort of custom, are compelled to go and hear the Word of God. They wish they lived in some place where they could do just as they liked. The wife who wants her husband and family to go up and hear the Gospel is thought harshly of because of it. Some men would even like, if they could, to have a family that was all the devil’s—but somehow or other God will not let them have their way. The godless man gets a godly wife and he is angry. By-and-by it turns out that one of the children receives God’s saving Graces and he cannot bear the thought of it. I have seen men in spiritual things just like madmen of Bedlam. God knew that those men would ruin themselves if they were let alone, so, first of all, he straitjacketed them with poverty, that they could not do what they would. Then, afterwards, when they began to tear and foam, He put them into a godly family, as maniacs are put into a padded room, so that, dash themselves as they will, they cannot hurt themselves! These men cannot get loose, but they will strain at their bonds and

foam and gnash because God has hold of them—and will not let the devil get the full mastery of them as they would like. O Sinner, the day may come when God will say of you, “Let him have his own way.” If He should give you up, then your doom will be sealed forever and your fate more desperate than words can describe! God help you and keep you from yourself, or else you will soon destroy yourself and go post haste to destruction!

But to turn to a more cheerful view of it, *in many persons this preventing Grace leads to something higher*. After preventing Grace has kept you back from sin, in comes *quickening* Grace and shows you the hatefulness of sin. And after that comes *pardonning* Grace and gives you power to believe in Jesus and, lo, your sins are put away! May God grant that this may be the case with some of you who have got no further yet than preventing Grace. Be grateful for that, thank God with all your heart for it! May it lead you to repentance. May it lead you to put your trust in Jesus and in Him only! Then you will pass from the mere prevention in which Grace is a shackle, to the liberty in which Grace becomes a shield and a sword, the joy and the sun of your life! May the long-suffering of God lead you to repentance!

But once again, to turn to the solemn chord once more, where it does not lead to higher things, *preventing Grace increases the responsibility of the man who receives it*. If a man will go over hedge and ditch to Hell, he shall find it a hard fall when he gets to the edge. If, when we put poison out of the way and remove everything with which a man can destroy himself, yet he will tear open his own veins, he is a suicide, indeed! Who shall pity him? And when God hedges you about, if you break the hedges—when He puts a bit in your mouth, if you stand chomping it until at last you get it from your jaws and turn to your own way—this will not be done without bringing on your head at the Last Great Day thunders of curses from the universe that shall judge you and the full lightning of wraths from the hand of God who shall condemn you!

I fear there are some here who are sinning against the Light of God. You are not without warnings in this land, not without calls and wooing invitations—the time was when you might have gone into many of the churches in London and not have heard the Gospel so that you could understand it, but now in the corners of the streets and in the theatres you may hear it if you will. And God is my Witness when I say there is one place where you can hear it preached with earnestness and I rejoice to know there are thousands of others! Souls, if you perish, it is not for lack of invitations to Christ! If you will not have Christ, it is a willful rejection! If you will be lost, blame not the minister—lay it not at our door—we are clear of your blood! We shake our garments of the dust of your souls! We will not be responsible for you. We warn you, we cry aloud to you and if you will not hear, but will go and turn to the downward road, on your own heads be your doom forever and ever!

But instead of enlarging on these and other points, I will try, as God shall help me, to give you a little advice, in the hope that some who have come up, perhaps to a cattle show, or the Handel Festival, or the Great Exhibition, may get more than they came for! Who can tell, some of you may have to say in time and eternity, “Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, who sent you this day to meet me, and blessed be your advice!”

Now, young man fresh from the country, you have a scheme in your head and you are going to carry it out tomorrow. If my prayer for you is heard you will not do so! You have come up to London to have a merry time of it—I hope you will have a merry time of another sort! Consider your ways. Think! Why will you go willfully and with your eyes open into that sin? It may be the last sin you will ever commit! It may be that you will die in the act. Great God, how prophetic these words may be! Am I pronouncing the doom of some soul here? Such things have happened and it may be that they will happen again. Oh, I pray you, Friend, stay your hand. Shall I fall down upon my knees and pray you to stop, for an impulse is upon me to speak thus—do not, do not, it is for your life! Back with your hand, man, for fear of the viper’s tooth! You are playing on the hole of the asp, but his tongue is ready and his fang shall envenom all your veins! By God, by Christ, by Heaven, by Hell, I entreat you, you who have intended some sin, cease from it! May this advice be blessed to you!

Have you not already had enough? What, man? Have you killed yourself and is not that enough? Are you a lost man tonight and is not that enough? Would you bury deep in sin even your last hope? The leprosy is in you now—would you make it stare in men’s faces on your very forehead? Oh, stop! Stop! You have gone far enough, the wonder is that you are spared, seeing you have gone so far! What has all your indulgence up to now brought you? Is there real pleasure in sin? What has been your experience up till now? Is it not a rough road, though it promised to be a joyous one? Have you not already had enough to bear as the result of your evil conduct? Why, therefore, continue to spend your money for that

which is not bread, and your labor for that which satisfies not? As the voice of one crying in the wilderness would I now seek to prepare the way of the Lord into your heart! Cease from evil, man! Consider your sin and repent of it, for I hope that to you the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.

What if, instead of going into sin tonight, you should take my advice and seek the Savior and find Him? If God bless you, you shall be saved, but if you have shut your ears to God's pleading, it shall not be my fault. Man! Man! You are lost and ruined by the Fall, but there is One who is able to save, even to the uttermost, those that come to Him. To come to Christ is to trust Him. I have preached this Gospel for many years and I do not think I ever finished a sermon except in one way—by trying to explain what is meant by this simple trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. Young man, you have the idea that you are to do 20 things. You have been trying to get ready for Christ—that is not the Gospel. That is the Law! The Gospel is trust Jesus Christ, trust Jesus Christ! He died upon the Cross that He might bear the punishment of the sins of all who believe in Him. So to believe in Him is to trust Him. Trust Him and then it is certain that your sins were laid on Christ and that He suffered in your place. Come to Jesus, come to Jesus, Sinner, come now!

What if this should be the time when the Lord shall meet with you? Write it down, you angels, in your golden tablets! Record the birthday of a soul! Take down your harps, you bright ones! Strike the chords with a new and Heaven-born ardor. Cherubim and seraphim, lift up your voices to notes untried as yet while God Himself breaks forth into a song, rejoicing in singing over them that come unto Him through Jesus Christ, His Son. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved." Believe now, you in this area and you in these galleries. Oh, that you would believe in Jesus now! Thank God if you have not gone to the great lengths some have gone, but remember you cannot be saved except through faith in Jesus! If you have gone to the greatest lengths, thank God you have not yet gone too far, for He can still reach you. He has a long arm and He can find you in the very depths of your iniquity. Trust Him, Sinner, trust Him, now, and there shall be joy in Heaven over sinners that repent more than over 99 just persons that need no repentance! May God add His own blessing for Jesus' sake. Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON: *JONAH 1.*

Verses 1-3. *Now, the word of the LORD came unto Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before Me. But Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the Presence of the LORD, and went down to Joppa; and he found a ship going to Tarshish: so he paid the fare thereof, and went down into it, to go with them unto Tarshish from the Presence of the LORD.* Observe the misconduct of the Prophet Jonah. He had a plain command from the Lord and he knew it to be a command, but he felt that the commission given to him would not be pleasant and honoring to himself and, therefore, he declined to comply with it. We see, from his action, how some who really know God may act as if they knew Him not. Jonah knew that God was everywhere, yet he "rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the Presence of the Lord." What strange inconsistencies there often are even in good men! Here is one who is favored with a Divine commission—one who knows God and fears Him—yet, for all that, he ventures on the fool's errand of endeavoring to escape from the Omnipresent! He "went down to Joppa," which was the port of his country, "and he found a ship going to Tarshish."

Learn from this that Providence alone is not a sufficient guide for our actions. He may have said, "It was very singular that there was a ship there going to Tarshish just when I reached the port. I gather from this that God was not so very disinclined for me to go to Tarshish." Precepts, not Providences, are to guide Believers. And when Christians quote a Providence against a Precept—which is to set God against God—they act most strangely. There are devil's providences as well as Divine Providences, and there are tempting providences as well as assisting Providences, so learn to judge between the one and the other.

4. *But the LORD sent out a great wind into the sea, and there was a mighty tempest in the sea, so that the ship was like to be broken.* Learn, hence, that "Omnipotence has servants everywhere." The Lord is never short of sheriff's officers to arrest His fugitives and on that occasion He "sent out a great wind into the sea." "The wind blows where it wishes." That is true, but it is also true that the wind blows where God wishes—and He knew how to send that great wind to the particular ship. No doubt many ships were on the Mediterranean at that time, but possibly unto none of them was the

storm sent save unto the one which carried Jonah, son of Amittai! We say, “Every bullet has its billet,” and this great wind was sent to pursue the fugitive Prophet.

5. *Then the mariners were afraid, and cried every man unto his god.* If there is ever a special time for prayer, it is a time of need. Nature seems then to compel men to utter prayer of such a sort as it is, for it is but nature’s prayer at the best! “The mariners were afraid, and cried every man unto his god.”

5. *And cast forth the wares that were in the ship into the sea, to lighten it of them.* Life is precious and a man will give up everything else in order to save it. Satan spoke the truth when he said, “Skin for skin, yes, all that a man has, will he give for his life.” From the action of these mariners we may learn that sometimes we may lighten our ship for the safety of our souls. When we have less to carry, we probably shall sail more safely. Losses and crosses may turn out to be our greatest gains. Let the ill-gotten ingots go to the bottom of the sea and lo, the ship rights herself at once!

5. *But Jonah was gone down into the depth of the ship; and he lay and was fast asleep.* The greatest sinner on that ship appeared to be the least concerned about the storm which had come because of him! He did not even seem to know that there was a storm, for he had “gone down into the depth of the ship; and he lay and was fast asleep.”

6. *So the shipmaster came to him, and said unto him, What are you doing, O sleeper? Arise, call upon your God. Perhaps your God will think upon us, that we perish not.* It is hard when sinners have to rebuke saints! And when an uncircumcised Gentile can address a Prophet of God in language like this!

7. *And they said everyone to his fellow, Come and let us cast lots, that we may know for whose cause this evil is upon us. So they cast lots and the lot fell upon Jonah.* We commend not the action of these men in casting lots, but we admire the Providence by which the lot fell upon Jonah. Solomon says, “The lot is cast into the lap,” but he did not say that it was right that lots should be cast into the lap—and he very properly added—“but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord.”

8. *Then they said unto him, Tell us, we pray you for whose cause this evil is upon us, What is your occupation? And from where have you come? What is your country? And of what people are you?* I do not know whether these men had traded with those who then lived in these islands, but they had a very English custom of not judging a man before they had heard him speak. It would be well if we all practiced it more—so that before we condemn men, we were willing to hear their side of the story. Considering that there was such a storm raging, the questions put to Jonah were remarkably calm. They were very comprehensive and went to the very root of the matter.

9. *And he said unto them, I am an Hebrew.* That let them know from where he came and what his country was.

9. *And I fear the LORD, the God of Heaven, which has made the sea and the dry land.* That, I suppose, must be regarded as his occupation. And what a blessed occupation it is—to be occupied with the fear of the Lord! So, you see that though Jonah was not properly following his occupation while he was on board that ship, yet he did not hesitate to avow, “I am a Hebrew; and I fear the Lord, the God of Heaven, which has made the sea and the dry land.” The child of God, even when he gets where he ought not to be, if you test him and try him, will stand to his colors. He will confess that he is, after all, a servant of the living God.

10. *Then were the men exceedingly afraid, and said unto him, Why have you done this?* Jonah had to go through this catechism, question after question, and this was the hardest of them all. “Why have you done this?” Could you, dear Friend, submit every action of your life to this test? “Why have you done this?” I am afraid that there are some actions, which we have performed for which we could not give a reason, or the reasons for which we would not like to give to our fellow men, much less to our God!

10, 11. *For the men knew that he fled from the Presence of the LORD, because he had told them. Then said they unto him, What shall we do to you, that the sea may be calm to us?* Here is another question! the catechism is not yet finished and this is one of the most difficult questions of all.

11, 12. *For the sea was growing more tempestuous. And he said unto them, Take me up and cast me forth into the sea; so shall the sea be calm to you.* Notwithstanding all his faults, Jonah was an eminent type of Christ. We know that from our Lord’s own words, for he was as long in the belly of the whale as Christ was in the heart of the earth. Here he seems to be a type of our Savior! “Take me up, and cast me forth into the sea: so shall the sea be calm to you.”

12, 13. *For I know that for my sake this great tempest is upon you. Nevertheless the men rowed hard to bring it to the land.* They showed a deal of good feeling in all their treatment of Jonah. They could not bear to take away a fellow creature's life, so they pulled and tugged in order to get the ship to land.

13. *But they could not: for the sea continued to grow more tempestuous against them.* Their safety lay in the sacrifice—not in the labor. They rowed hard to bring the ship to land, but their efforts were of no avail. If they would cast Jonah overboard, then they would be safe.

14, 15. *They then cried unto the LORD, and said, We beseech You, O LORD, we beseech You, let us not perish for this man's life, and lay not upon us innocent blood: for You, O LORD, have done as it pleased You. So they took up Jonah.* Put the emphasis on the first phrase, "So they took up Jonah"—that is, with great reluctance, with much pity and sorrow, not daring to do such a deed as that wantonly and with a light heart. When men do deeds like this on a far greater scale and go to war with a light heart, they will have a heavy heart before long. If ever you have to cast a brother out of the Church—if ever you have to relinquish the friendship of any man—do it as these men did with Jonah—patiently, and carefully. Investigate the matter and do not act until you are driven to it after consulting the Lord.

15, 16. *And cast him forth into the sea: and the sea ceased from her raging. Then the men feared the LORD exceedingly, and offered a sacrifice unto the LORD, and made vows.* Jonah had been the means of causing a greater change than he expected! His conduct and punishment had been a warning to those thoughtless sailors. They could not but believe in the God who had thus followed up His fugitive servant.

17. *Now the LORD had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah.* He prepared a storm, He prepared a fish and we afterwards read that He prepared a gourd and He prepared a worm. In the great things of life and in the little things, God is always present! The swimming of a great fish in the sea is, surely, not a thing that is subject to law. If ever there is free agency in this world, it must certainly be in the wanderings of such a huge creature that follows its own instincts and plows its way through the great wastes of the wide and open sea! Yes, that is true. Yet there is a Divine predestination concerning all its movements. Over every motion of the fin of every minnow, predestination presides! There is no distinction of little or great in God's sight—He that wings an angel guides a sparrow! "The Lord had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah."

17. *And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.* So round about the truant Prophet was the preventing Grace of Jehovah.

—Adapted from *The C. H. Spurgeon Collection*, Version 1.0, Ages Software, 1.800.297.4307

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