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"Comparison" pt. 2

Robert Surgenor

The Prophecy of Jeremiah

Jeremiah had prophesied that Israel was to come out of Babylon exactly 70 years after being taken captive (Jer. 25:11-12). The time was now at hand, so what happened?

Shotts Scotland - 1630

Can we not apply this historic event to our day? We certainly can. Go back to June 21, 1630, and what do you find? You find the beginning of a work of God in saving souls. In Shotts, Scotland, 500 were saved at one meeting held by faithful men of the Scottish Church. There were no gimmicks, no theatrics, no altar calls, just the power of the Holy Spirit. I call this a "former glory."

Later, between 1800 and 1825, Thomas Chambers and Andrew Thompson preached with such power that many confirmed church members were awakened to see their lost condition, and were saved. It was also in those days that Brownlow North, Boner, and Murray McCheyne preached with great blessing in the salvation of many.

Donald Ross - 1858

In 1858, Donald Ross, a man of 34 years of age, was appointed superintendent of the Northeast Coast Mission, whose headquarters were in Aberdeen, Scotland. Choosing John Smith, Donald Munro, John Gill, and others, these men evangelized 500 miles of coastline in north-east Scotland, involving at least 57 villages.

Kells, Northern Ireland - 1859

It was in 1859 that the big revival began in my father's home town of Kells, in Northern Ireland. Before the fires of the

gospel message flamed, there were a number of godly women that held meetings for prayer in an old stone building in Kells. The building still stands today.

Then Jeremiah Meneely began meetings in a barn for the preaching of the gospel. The flame rose high, souls were saved, and the gospel spread throughout Great Britain and over into Europe. Thousands were falling down crying to God to have mercy on them. I call this, "the former glory."

When in Ireland in 1999, I visited with Meneely's granddaughter in her grandfathers home in Kells. It gave me a strange feeling. So great was the manifestation of the power of God that many fishing villages in Scotland halted all fishing while thousands were being saved!

The Devil Aroused

When God works, the devil works. Opposition rose from the established clergy of that day. Everything was done to discourage and hinder new converts. The disturbed clergy had their ways of hindering the work of God. They began to put pressure on those who held the control of the N. E. Coast Mission's funds. This resulted in Donald Ross severing his connection with the Mission. This, of course, placed him and his co-workers without funds. However, that same year, Ross and his companions formed the Northern Evangelical Society, thus escaping the bondage and control of the N.E. Coast Mission.

By 1869 Munro and Gill were seeing great blessing in souls being saved. In 1871, amidst much opposition God was working in mighty power. Among their converts were 200 young men, one of them being John Ritchie, a name

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well known to most of us. No scriptural assembly had yet been formed, consequently the new converts were directed back to their denominational church to be taught. This sad affair drove Donald Ross and his companions to their knees in prayer, seeking divine guidance from God as to what to do. The answer came. The preachers themselves came to realize the truth of believer's baptism, and submitted to the divine ordinance.

Following this, they then began to teach their converts the same, and hundreds submitted to the teaching and obeyed the Lord in baptism. Of course this greatly aggravated the religious world, and the clergy mocked and ridiculed these men with such "strange" ideas. However, as the opposition grew, so did the distance between the faithful evangelists and their converts with the established religious system of that day. That was a step in the right direction.

The First Breaking of Bread

It was in a carpenter's shop in Old Rayne, Scotland, that the evangelists and many new believers met for prayer and the study of the God's Word. They soon learned the truth of gathering solely to the name and Person of the Lord Jesus Christ. Acting upon their newly learned truth, they remembered the Lord in the breaking of the bread. John Ritchie was present at that memorable meeting. Soon, assemblies sprang up throughout Scotland and Northern England.

The Truth Reaching Canada

In 1871 the truth of gathering unto the Lord's name reached Ontario, Canada, through Donald Monro. The gospel was proclaimed in Parkhill and Forest and a great number were saved. The following year, 1872, an assembly was planted in Parkhill, and the following year assemblies were planted in Forest and Lake Shore.

From there the fires of truth reached out to Hamilton, Clyde, Toronto and London, Ontario. God was definitely moving. Soon brethren reached out to Detroit, in the USA, and saw God working with them throughout the State of Michigan.

The Maritime Provinces

As time moved on, John Knox McEwen was found laboring in the Maritime Provinces, John Smith in Cleveland, John Gill in Boston, Donald Ross in Chicago, Kansas City, and the United States West Coast. Assemblies were also being planted across the Canadian Prairies, Vancouver and the West Coast of Canada. John Blair invaded Iowa and along with Oliver Smith, saw a mighty work done for God.

These men were not "Carpet Slipper" preachers, nor "Gentlemen" preachers, but were rather hard working laborers in the gospel. Thus we have the history of a great truth revived, namely, owning no ecclesiastical name, but simply gathering to the name and the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ. This was, "the former glory," of assembly history.

Great Italian Work - 1893

Also, consider the great Italian work, mainly in New England. In 1893 there was an assembly planted in Hoboken, New Jersey, and Brooklyn, New York. These were the first Italian assemblies planted in this country.

Ten Assemblies Established

In 1928 an assembly was planted in Danbury; in 1929, one in Bristol; in 1931, another in Hartford; in 1933 one in New Rochelle, and Poughkeepsie, New York; then another in 1934 in South Brooklyn; followed by another in 1935 in Methuen; then in 1938, one in Worcester; then another in 1941, in East Boston; and in 1942, another assembly in Springfield. This was the result of immigrant Italian men with a burning desire to make Christ known in the preaching of the gospel in tents, store fronts, and homes.

Caesar Patrizio – Louis Rosania

On one occasion, when Caesar Patrizio and Louis Rosania were preaching in their tent in Philadelphia, brother Patrizio wrote to Charles Keller that he was suffering from pains in his back, and was thinking of re-opening a tailor shop. Brother Keller wrote back and warned him that if the Lord had called him into His work, and he returned to secular work, that the Lord would not only give him more pain in his back, but that he would also break it.

Cesare Illuminati was a staunch socialist and agnostic, and certainly had no regard for the gospel. One day, a friend named Matthew Brescia invited him to come with him to a tent to hear brother Patrizio. Illuminati laughed and mocked, but brother Brescia kept on insisting that he go with him. Filling his coat pockets with stones to hurl at the preacher, Illuminati finally consented to go. He purposed to throw the stones at Patrizio, if Patrizio said anything he didn't like. Sitting up front Illuminati listened intently. He had been a prodigal son in his youth, and lo and behold, this was Patrizio's message - the prodigal son in Luke 15. At first Illuminati was furious, but he continued to listen. He began to wonder who told the preacher all about himself. Fear overcame him, and after the meeting, he rushed to brother Patrizio and demanded to know who

told him all about himself. Patrizio assured him that he had never seen him before and that nobody had ever mentioned him to him. Illuminati went home that night, convicted that it was God that had been speaking to him. Shortly after, he was saved.

This was characteristic of those godly Italian evangelists. They waited entirely on God for everything. They looked to God to tell them where to preach, what to preach, and how long to continue preaching where they were.

Various Gifts of Italian Preachers

Rocco Cappiello was not a platform preacher, but he was a tireless plodder, laboring door to door and handing out thousands of gospel tracts. Louis Rosania was a man that could win an enemy through his personality. He was a tremendous personal worker and effective evangelist. Caesar Patrizio was a personal worker, and also a man that could teach Roman Catholic converts the right ways of the Lord relative to gathering to the Lord's name. Francis Carboni and Frank Pizzulli were expositors of the Word, and ably taught the saints divine truths.

Of course as this work continued, there was persecution. Most of the converts were immigrants from Italy and had been Roman Catholics. The faithful Italian laborers were hated by the clergy. On occasions, some slept in their gospel tents to keep their tent from being damaged or burned.

On one occasion in 1946, Frank Pizzulli and Louis Rosania pitched their tent in Mechanicville, N.Y., and blessings were seen. Satan was angry, as he always is when God is working in salvation. The Chief of Police, together with the local Catholic priest, ordered the property owner to have the gospel tent removed from his property. Consequently, the brethren found another lot to pitch their tent. Then the Chief of Police ordered that no tracts or leaflets could be distributed. However, the brethren went to the State Capital in Albany, and the Attorney General had the Police Chief's demand reversed, much to his embarrassment.

God continued to work, many souls were saved and baptized, and on the first Lord's Day of December an assembly was planted. Then in January, ten more were baptized and added to the assembly, which brought the number up to 36 in the fellowship. If new converts convinced the brethren that they were saved, by their testimony and their life, then they were baptized, and immediately brought into the assembly. As William Warke once said, "If they are fit for the waters of baptism, then they are also fit for assembly fellowship." I take that concept to

be correct. If brethren are totally convinced that a soul is truly saved, and worthy to be baptized, then after they are baptized, what is the object in keeping them from the fellowship of the assembly any longer? If they see the truth of the assembly, what is further waiting supposed to accomplish? Furthermore, where can one find the scripture to condone further waiting? They can't!

A Parallel in Israel's History

Thus in the work of establishing assemblies in Canada, and the USA, and the work of establishing testimonies among the Italians, we see a parallel in Israel's history. At the call of God almost 50,000 Jews left Babylon and went back to the place where the Lord had chosen to place His name. The journey was long, about 600 miles, and at an average of eight and one half miles a day, it took them four months. It was a dangerous journey that involved bands of robbers along the way, but they committed themselves to the providential care and protection of their God.

Finally arriving in Jerusalem, the first thing they considered necessary was to establish communications with their God, thus they immediately built an altar and offered sacrifices thereon. Scripture tells us, "*As it is written in the law of Moses the man of God*" (Ezra 3:2). Their form of worship was based on the Word of God, not on their intellectualism or wisdom. That would never do. Is it not true, that the so-called worship that we see in Christendom, is based mostly on men's ideas, rather than on "what saith the Lord?"

Being the seventh month, they also kept the "*Feast of Tabernacles, as it is written.*" Now that is important "as it is written." I trust that we, in the assemblies today can say the same thing in all that we do, namely, "it is written." The "gathered out" brethren used to be known as "the men of the Book," but I am afraid that in recent years that description of us would be a misnomer. This is sad to confess, but true.

There would be the continual burnt offerings, also two goats, 14 rams, 71 young bullocks, and 155 lambs, but when we look back to the dedication of Solomon's Temple we find 22,000 oxen, and 120,000 sheep offered! That was the former glory! However, it was a great day, for many there had never offered an offering to the Lord. This was a first and a glorious occasion for them.

When the assemblies commenced in this land, over 140 years ago, for the first time, believers were able to worship as priests in a corporate way, with no presiding clergyman to conduct the order of the gathering. Later when conferences were initiated among the assemblies, there were no presiding clergy dictating to the speakers when to

rise, what to preach, and when to stop. All was left to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. In some assemblies this “former glory” has been relinquished for a more modern way of doing things, to our shame.

In regards to the setting up of the altar it is encouraging to see the attitude of this remnant upon settling back in the land. A pure priesthood was established. There were those who *“sought their register among those that were reckoned by genealogy, but they were not found: therefore were they, as polluted, put from the priesthood”* (Ezra 2:62).

Then we read that the chief of the fathers *“gave after their ability unto the treasure of the work”* (vs. 69). Thus we see self sacrifice and devotion to the work that was about to commence.

How beautiful to see in Ezra 3:1, that *“the people gathered themselves together as one man in Jerusalem.”* This reveals the unity of those who had returned to the place of the Name.

Having set the altar on its bases, *“they kept also the feast of tabernacles, as it is written, and offered the daily burnt offerings by number, according to the custom, as the duty of every day required”* (vs. 4). Thus the word of God was given its rightful place as their guide.

All of this reminds us of the high spiritual tone of a former year when the assemblies gathered unto His name commenced. There was a pure priesthood, willing sacrifices for the cause were common, and there was a godly unity, and complicit obedience to the word of God. Everything the early brethren did, they had a “thus saith the Lord” for it. That was the former glory.

Successful Adversaries

However, there were adversaries in Zerubbabel’s day, and consequently the construction of the temple ceased, much to their shame. For sixteen years the foundation lay with nothing built upon it. It seems that the problem was that they began to think more about themselves, than the testimony of God. Oh, they worked, but the work was all for themselves. They built themselves houses, which was necessary, but even cield the walls of their dwellings, which seems to me to be a luxury. This indifference lasted for 16 years, to their shame.

(Continued)

Exercise of Gift, pt. 3

William Rogers

(Excerpted from “Notes on St. Paul’s Epistle to the Corinthians”)

We have seen how in vs. 15, 16 of this 12th chapter, Paul warns those possessed of what they look upon as lesser gifts, against being jealous of such as have greater ones. Yet there is another side to this matter, as we must realise when we note that the final exhortation of the chapter runs, *“Covet (R.V. ‘desire’) earnestly the best (R.V. ‘greater’) gifts.”* Clearly there is a right kind of coveting as well as a wrong kind. The latter takes the form of envying others, while the former takes that of striving to make progress in our lives, and is illustrated by the Apostle’s injunction to Timothy, *“Neglect not the gift that is in thee . . . that thy progress may be manifest to all.”* 1 Tim. 4:14, 15 (R.V.).

This exhortation of v. 31 teaches us that gift is not a permanent and stationary thing, of which each gets a certain quantity to begin with, that may be neither added to nor diminished afterwards.

The command to *“desire earnestly the greater gifts”* implies that they are obtainable; and this IS emphasized by its repetition in almost the same words at ch. 14:1, where the subject is resumed, after the long parenthesis on the importance of love which occupies ch. 13, with the exhortation, *“Desire spiritual gifts, but rather that ye “all may prophesy.”*

The latter is followed by a passage designed to show that “prophecy” is a greater gift than is “speaking with tongues” ; and then at the end of the chapter we yet again find the words, *“Covet (R.V. ‘desire earnestly,’ as in v. 1 and ch. 12:31) to prophesy, and forbid not to speak with tongues.”* It is therefore quite evident that, by prayer and exercise, gift may be developed and increased.

We have spoken of the 13th chapter as a parenthesis, but that in no wise lessens its importance and significance. It not only supplies the lubricating oil to the machinery of ch. 12, ere it comes into action in ch. 14; but also furnishes the true antidote to all the evils wherewith the church of Corinth was ravaged. It has already been pointed out that the phrase, *“Love envieth not”* (ch. 13:4), stands over against the jealousy of ch. 12:15, 16, and *“Love vaunteth not itself”* over against the pride of ch. 12:21. In like manner we may add that the love which *“is not puffed up”* would have left no room for the party spirit of ch. 1:12, etc.; the love that *“rejoiceth not in iniquity”* would have prevented their complaisant tolerance of the evil thing in ch.

Some people want an assembly to be a social center for youth, rather than a testimony for truth.

S. Maxwell

5; the love which *"suffereth long and is kind"* would have hindered the lawsuits with their brethren of ch. 6; the love that *"seeketh not her own"* would never trample on the consciences of fellow-believers as in ch. 8; and the love which *"doth not behave itself unseemly"* would have put a bar on both the forwardness of certain women and the drunkenness of ch. 11. Moreover, this same many-sided love would, if we possessed it, solve most of our present day assembly troubles; because truehearted love for our Lord and for His people would find a way out of them all.

Indeed it is of interest to note that the term "a way," which we have just now used, is the very one with which love is introduced in our passage. To the exhortation, *"Desire earnestly the greater gifts"* (ch. 12:31, R.V.), is added, *"And a still more excellent WAY show I unto you."* Mark, it is not "a more excellent thing," but "a more excellent way."

Paul does in the 13th chapter prove clearly that, both in importance and in permanence, love is a greater thing than the greatest of the gifts: but his first aim is rather to point out that love is the most excellent WAY to discover which really is the greater gift; to attain to it when discovered: and to exercise it when attained. If I have love, I will judge the greater gift to be that one which will help and profit God's people most. I shall, for example, at once agree that *"greater is he that prophesieth than he that speaketh with tongues"*: because my aim will be, not self-glorification, but *"that the church may receive edifying."* Nay more, I shall count it *"greater" to be able to speak "five words"* that will reach the hearts and consciences of the saints, than to have the ability to put together "ten thousand" great swelling words of vanity that will not.

Furthermore, I shall realize that the absence of this love would render useless any gift I might possess. I shall say with the Apostle that, though I could speak with all the eloquence and ability of men and angels, unless I have love I am become as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal: that though I should excel in the gifts of prophecy, knowledge, and faith, without the love I would be nothing: that though I should display the utmost zeal in giving away all my property, and even suffering the loss of life itself, apart from love it all would profit me nothing. That is to say, I would be of no value, either to the saints (v. 1), or in God's sight (v. 2), or to myself (v. 3). For after all, most of these things which are enumerated in vs. 1, 3, are such as might lend themselves to ostentation and display, unless under the control of the love which gives to them their real value.

In the latter part of ch. 13 we have the permanence of love contrasted with the temporary character of the gifts.

Love, and its sister graces, faith and hope, will ever "abide" (v. 13); but the gifts will be superseded *"when that which is perfect is come,"* when we see *"face to face"* instead of *"in a mirror,"* when *"we know even as we are known."* Personally, I have no doubt that all these expressions take us beyond the coming of the Lord; though I am aware that some hold otherwise, and apply some or all of them to a time then shortly to arrive, when the New Testament Scriptures would be complete.

But in the first place, any careful reading of the passage will show that only one terminus is before the writer's mind, though expressed in these three differing forms, and that therefore all three bear the same reference. Once this is granted, I can only say that any student of the verses who is able to persuade himself that we today, even with the completed Scriptures in our hands, *"see face to face,"* and *"know even as we are known,"* whereas our brother Paul was only able to see *"in a glass darkly,"* is welcome to his opinion.

But let the passage be placed alongside the parallel one on the gifts in Eph. 4; and it should at once be evident that the same goal is in view in both: and that the terminus which is here described as *"when that which is perfect is come,"* and seeing *"face to face,"* and knowing *"even as also we are known,"* is the very same which is there spoken of as attaining unto *"the unity of the faith, and the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ"* (Eph. 4:13). And this state of things, most of us will agree, is not what we see around us to-day.

God governed the world well before we came into it, and He will be at no loss when we are removed. He has taken better care of our past and secured better results for the present than we have deserved; why should we be anxious about the future?
A. B. Simpson

"The Righteous Lord Loveth Righteousness"

Joel Portman

Having seen that believers live in a world characterized by unrighteousness, it is no wonder that God's Word requires that those who know a Righteous Lord also manifest righteousness in their lives. Since this is His

standard to which God is working universally and which governs all His actions, those who move in fellowship with Him and who anticipate that accomplished purpose should be governed by that characteristic as well.

The position that believers occupy is that of a reckoned righteousness, declared by God and based on the one righteous act of the Lord Jesus (Rom. 5:18-19). This position has not been gained or merited by self-efforts, be they religious or moral, but is a judicial declaration by God in view of the justifying work of the Savior on our behalf. Mr. W. E. Vine says ("Dictionary of New Testament Words") that "This righteousness is unattainable by obedience to any law, or by any merit of man's own, or any other condition than that of faith in Christ...The man who trusts in Christ becomes 'the righteousness of God in Him,' 2 Cor. 5:21, i.e., becomes in Christ all that God requires a man to be, all that he could never be in himself." That declaration has not made us practically righteous, but it has placed the believer in Christ in a justified position and has instilled in him the desire to be righteous and do righteousness in his life as a response. It is the result of the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit, who is the "Spirit of holiness," (Rom. 1:4). Again Mr. Vine says, "The faith thus exercised brings the soul into vital union with God in Christ, and inevitably produces righteousness of life, that is, conformity to the will of God."

Mentions of Two Righteous Men:

Noah vs. Lot

Noah is the first man who was identified as a righteous man (Gen. 6:9, 7:1) and this is the more remarkable when we consider the conditions under which he lived. He was living under very unrighteous, ungodly conditions of his world, not much different, possibly, from what we experience in our world today. Enoch was also a man who walked with God, and though it is not stated concerning him, he was obviously a righteous man who displayed a marked contrast with the world conditions. Amos 3:3 declares, "*How can two walk together except they be agreed,*" and he was walking in fellowship with a righteous Lord, as was Noah.

It's obvious that these men erase any possibility of one being able to plead that their environment, be it family, work place, neighborhood or society in general, is the reason why they do not live a righteous life before God, doing His will and manifesting practical obedience. Not only was Noah a righteous man, as God also declared Lot to be so in the wicked environment of Sodom (2 Pet. 2:7) but Noah was also a "preacher of righteousness," (2:5).

Lot's righteousness was known only to God and he failed to have any impact on those who knew him. Noah's was manifest to all, whatever was the means by which he might have preached righteousness, i.e., by word or by life, or by both. The use of the word "preacher," meaning a public herald speaking with authority as in 1 Tim. 2:7, 2 Tim. 1:11, seems to indicate that his testimony of righteousness involved his public declaration against the unrighteousness of those around him, prediction of God's righteous judgment against them, and his proclamation of what God expected to see in them. For this to be true and to have any weight, it required that he live a righteous life himself. It isn't the environment in which we live that will determine personal righteousness, but the fear of the Lord. Proverbs has more to say about "the fear of the Lord," than any other book of the Old Testament, and its positive results and virtues are clearly emphasized (Prov. 1:7, 29; 2:5; 9:10; 16:6). We notice that Prov. 1:29 teaches that the fear of the Lord is a choice to be made. So it seems that Noah was motivated more than Lot by that fear, rather than the fear of men. He found grace (favor) in the eyes of the Lord (Gen. 6:8) which was far more important than finding favor with men. Lot obtained mercy from God and was personally delivered from Sodom's overthrow. It is true that his righteous soul was vexed with their filthy manner of life, but that was inward and not outwardly expressed. It seems clear from God's commentary on the two men in Peter's second epistle, that a believer can determine to live according to one or the other pattern, either seeking to accommodate himself to the world as much as possible so as to be hidden among them, or to live boldly and without compromise for God and His Word. Which one represents the character of our lives? Sadly, so many believers today are living lives that fail to measure up to the standard of righteousness that the Lord desires to see in us.

We see that Noah was called a man who was "*perfect in his generations,*" (Gen. 6:9). Another has translated this as "blameless" and it is defined as complete, whole, sound, having integrity. We also learn that it implies what is complete or entirely in accord with truth and fact (Brown, Driver, Briggs, "Hebrew Definitions"). It is a word also linked with righteousness in Prov. 11:5: "*The righteousness of the perfect shall direct his way, but the wicked shall fall by his own wickedness.*" It likely implies at the least that Noah was a man who stood apart from the idolatrous practices of his day so that he wasn't guilty of the conditions mentioned in vs. 5. We note that the expression, Noah's generations, likely refers to his contemporaries among whom he lived, so again it emphasizes that he maintained a

testimony that God recognized as being distinct from others. We know of those who, seeking to avoid the reproach of bearing testimony for Christ, seek to walk with “one foot in the world and the other in the Christian life,” and this always results in failure and ruin. It is a dishonor to Christ as well, in view of all that He suffered for us. The devil is always seeking to turn men from the truth to prevent their salvation, and having failed that, he will try to prevent believers from living lives wholly devoted to Christ and obedient to His Word. The world loves compromise, yet it will despise any Christian who lives like Lot and then tries to reprove it for unrighteousness.

Noah, rather than Lot, is in the chapter of those who triumphed by faith (Heb. 11) and we note that it was without following the law of Moses or the ritual of religious ceremonialism. Rather it was by faith, which formed the basis of his life of communion with God and caused his response to God’s command. *“Therefore by the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified in His sight”* (Rom. 3:20). The law couldn’t make a man righteous positionally, neither could it empower a person to live righteously! (Rom. 8:4, 10, Phil. 3:9). It could condemn unrighteousness and prove one to be guilty of sin, but it couldn’t make anyone righteous.

We might also note that Noah’s righteousness was the reason why he was preserved through the flood, escaping that universal judgment; he believed God and acted accordingly. Such faith demonstrated in personal righteousness and obedience will also preserve a child of God from being swallowed up in the ruin that would otherwise result, though his eternal salvation is secured if truly saved. It is the man who built his house on the rock in Matt. 7, who survived the storm, wind, flood, and all that would represent the elements of judgmental destruction or severe trial, and he is equated with those who hear and DO the word of God. Obedience to divine truth always has its rewards, both in this life and the next. Lot was delivered out of the overflow of Sodom, but he lost everything that he counted precious in his life. He was as one *“saved, yet so as by (through the) fire,”* (1 Cor. 3:15).

Lot’s righteousness resulted in his personal preservation from Divine judgment, but he was unable to save others or influence them in the right. Noah’s righteousness saved his entire family, the human race, the line of the Messiah, and the animal life of earth, and it condemned the world for its unrighteousness. It also resulted in him becoming *“heir of the righteousness which is by faith,”* (Heb. 11:7). What great results are produced from genuine, expressed righteousness!

Other Examples of Righteous Men

Other men in the Old Testament were marked by righteousness, and their lives give us examples of what it means to be righteous before God. Job was a righteous man who suffered (in his mind) unrighteously, based on what he knew of what those of that character deserved. The word in various forms that is translated “righteous” is found more in Job than other books, (according to some). Daniel was marked by righteousness, especially as we understand the original word to carry the meaning of genuine loyalty. He was intensely and unwaveringly loyal to the Lord, even in a far-off land of captivity. He resolved and committed himself to a manner of life that unceasingly avoided any contamination or defilement. He was rewarded as a result in being promoted above all others who were his peers. Others were truly righteous before God, even though possibly not identified as such. Zacharias and Elizabeth (Luke 1:6) were both righteous before God with a life that was marked by obedience and blamelessness regarding God’s Word. The pattern believers in the New Testament era were marked by integrity, faithfulness to the Lord, and righteous living. That pattern was continued through the history of the church ever since the beginning, even when it resulted in suffering because of it; God’s faithful people manifest His character by how they live.

Principles of Righteousness

Girdlestone (“Old Testament Synonyms”) states that the original word in the Hebrew language for righteousness signifies “to be stiff or straight,” and “it implies conformity with the line or rule of God’s law.” The theme of the requirement of righteousness for one to know fellowship with God is the theme of Scripture, and it is emphasized in Proverbs, with the warnings against any form of life that is dishonest, immoral, or in any way untrue to the Word of God (Prov. 2:7,20, 10:3, etc.). It is linked with true wisdom, and is one result of wisdom’s work in an individual. God’s desire for His people presently is that they live righteous lives. That indicates that they must turn away from evil or wrong in any form, knowing that it is contrary to His righteous standard.

Righteousness in the life is a characteristic of the new birth in John’s first epistle (1 Jn. 2:29, 3:7, 10). In each of these cases the emphasis is on “doeth righteousness,” which indicates the characteristic of the life, not the standing reckoned by faith. Peter exhorts believers to *“live unto righteousness”* (1 Pet. 2:24) and commends them for suffering for “righteousness sake,” (1 Pet. 3:14). 2 Tim. 3:16 teaches that the inspired Scriptures are given to

because they are *“profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness,”* thus guiding a Christian in the principles that will produce a correspondingly righteous life. It is the standard of God’s Word that clearly instructs us in the life that is pleasing to the Lord. That same inspired Scripture reveals the perfect standard of righteousness seen in a Man, and that is in the life of our blessed Savior and Lord. Occupation with Him will always produce a corresponding character in us, taking the truth of 2 Cor. 3:18 in this way that beholding Him (no doubt as the glorified Man in heaven), we are *“changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.”*

This is the standard that the Lord expects in us and which brings pleasure to His heart. It represents the reality of Christian profession, preserves one from evil and maintains him in a pathway of life that will bring eternal reward in future. May this move our hearts to seek to manifest a clear, unmistakable fidelity to our Lord and show it by obedience to His Word.

“Preaching is not a profession, and a preacher is not the product of the schools. The first requisite for preaching is a divine commission; God’s call laughs at human qualification. If Paul was called for His learning and eloquence, why was Peter called, with his ignorance and brogue? Paul answers for both: “not of men, neither by men,” that the gospel be not the “wisdom of man’s words.”

Jonah: The Miracle, Part 7

Steve Walvatne

“Now the Lord had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights...And the Lord spake unto the fish, and it vomited Jonah upon the dry land” (Jonah 1:17; 2:10).

Jonah is a book of miracles. Every chapter describes the marvelous works of God in relation to the prophet. We read of a Mighty Crest and a Monstrous Creature, of Miraculous Conversion and Momentary Compassion, but Jonah’s experience with the “great fish” outshines everything. It has

intrigued readers for centuries and been identified by the Lord Jesus as “the sign of the prophet Jonas” (Matt. 12: 39; 16:4; Lk. 11:29-30). For that reason, we entitle it “The Miracle,” and will approach it under three headings, noting how Jonah was (1) Swallowed by the Fish, (2) Sustained in the Fish, and (3) Surrendered by the Fish.

Swallowed by the Fish

Not since verse 4 have we had a direct statement concerning Jehovah. After hurling a “great wind” at the sea, He remains out of sight until Jonah himself is thrown overboard. Then the scene turns solemnly ironic, for instead of Jonah going at God’s command to catch “fish” (Matt. 4:19) in a great city, the Lord commands a great fish to catch Jonah. The mariners undoubtedly thought Jonah had plunged to a watery grave, but unknown to them, the Lord’s purpose was not to drown Jonah, but discipline him, that he might be serviceable again.

Others’ impressions are often mistaken. Conclusions are regularly drawn as to why this or that occurred in another’s life, and some go so far as to prophesy an outcome. But God’s purposes with His people are not laid out for all to see. Not a single crewmember foresaw the outcome of God’s dealings with Jonah and neither did the prophet himself. *“Whatsoever the Lord pleased, that did He in heaven, and in earth, in the seas, and all the deep places”* (Ps. 135:6). Many times, chastised souls marvel at the goodness of God in the end, causing them to utter, *“He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities”* (Ps. 103:10). Jonah’s recollections of this harrowing experience likely stirred similar thoughts in his own soul.

We read the Lord “had prepared” a great fish. “Appointed” or “assigned” are preferable to “prepared” since this wasn’t a case of new creation, but of divine communication. The fish was directed by God to a specific boat on the sea, and there employed to retrieve an endangered individual at just the right moment. The Lord’s disciples “marveled” that “even the wind and the sea obey Him,” (Matt. 8:27), yet here we go deeper, and witness Jehovah’s sovereignty over creatures dwelling in the darkest recesses of those seas.

This fish was “appointed” or “assigned,” but we shouldn’t diminish God’s handiwork in transforming it into a suitable vessel for human transportation. The One that prepared a garden for Adam prepared this fish for Jonah, though the two surroundings could not have been starker. Little profit is gained in trying to identify the species of fish since Scriptures are silent on that point. We know, howev-

er, that the description “whale” in Matthew 12:40 is not accurate, and is better translated “sea monster” or “huge fish.”

Skeptics scoff at the account here, while others turn to “*science falsely so-called*” (1 Tim. 6:20) for an explanation, but those who know the inspired record’s Author, see no ground for doubt. After all, isn’t “*so great salvation*” (Heb. 2:3) a far more stupendous work than the appointment of a great fish? The spiritual insight of a poor, illiterate woman is frequently quoted and rightly so. She said, “If it were written that Jonah swallowed the fish, instead of the fish swallowing Jonah, I should believe it simply because it was written.” That’s not gullibility, but unwavering faith at Scripture’s infallibility.

The fish was to “swallow up” Jonah. “It is appropriate,” writes Malcolm Horlach, “that a chapter which commenced with a reference to a man who would not open his mouth at God’s command should conclude with a reference to a marine creature which would!” (“The Minor Prophets-Their Relevance for Today: Jonah”). Jonah’s assignment and that of the fish were both missions of mercy, and each was used as a voice to Israel (Matt. 12:40-41). God particularly turned the prophet’s “swallowing up” into a type of the Saviour’s forthcoming death. This didn’t mean, however, that Jonah had to literally die in the sea (as some assert), any more than Isaac’s being bound to the altar demanded his death if he was to typify Christ’s sacrifice. Noah sailed over the waters of judgment in a SUITED CRAFT, Israel walked through them on a SANDY CAUSEWAY, and Jonah passed under them in a SEA CREATURE, but our Saviour found no refuge. He, the great Antitype, bore its awful turbulence at Calvary – the place Samuel Francis eloquently described, as “Mercy’s vast, unfathomed sea.”

But Jonah’s failure also pictured the results of Israel’s rebellion. They were “swallowed up” by Gentile nations, and remain so, until a future time of restoration and joy (Lam. 2:5; Hos. 8:8; Ezek. 28:25-26). In his book, “A Durable Peace,” Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, related his conversation with China’s President Zian Zemin in 1999. The Chinese leader alluded to their people as two of the oldest civilizations on earth. Netanyahu agreed, adding India to the list. Jaws dropped, however, when the Chinese and Indian populations (1.2 billion and 1 billion respectively) were set alongside that of Jews worldwide (12 million). Zemin wondered what happened and Netanyahu responded, “...The Chinese kept China; the Indians kept India; but we Jews lost our land and were dispersed to the four corners of the earth. From this sprang

all our calamities, culminating in our greatest catastrophe in the twentieth century [the holocaust]. This is why for the last two thousand years we have been trying to retrieve our homeland and recreate our independent state there.”

Sustained in the Fish

The fish carried Jonah three days and three nights. For it to sustain him, the fish’s internal atmosphere and digestive juices had to be altered by divine power. Still, what a horrific sanctuary! “The man found himself in a place dark as pitch,” wrote Charles Reade (“A Study of Jonah”), and John Broad adds, “The preservation of the prophet in this dark and filthy cell can only be ascribed to the interposition of the Almighty” (“Lectures on Jonah”).

The Lord brought Jonah to the edge of life that he might comprehend the folly of running from God. No luxury liner whisked him home and no crowds thronged his way. Having left Jehovah in the belly of a boat, he was commandeered home in the belly of a beast, amid austere surroundings and complete solitude. The Lord showed mercy, but He wasn’t indulgent. Sin never merits sympathy or pampering, but ruthless rebuke, for “*sin is lawlessness*” (1 Jn. 3:4, JND). There cannot be full recovery as long as wayward souls blame God or wallow in self-pity. Sin must be faced frankly and Jonah’s confined quarters were conducive to just such correction.

For three days and three nights, the fish kept Jonah alive. We know from Hebrew reckoning, that parts of a day constitute a whole, so that neither Jonah, nor the Saviour was in their respective graves a full 72 hours. Rather, the time interred consisted of one full day with parts of the preceding and succeeding days included, making three days and three nights. No definite hours are given, which casts greater emphasis on the number three. Jonah’s time in the fish was a sign of Christ’s three days and three nights in the grave – He being resurrected on the “third day” (1 Cor. 15:4). “Three” signified heaven’s approbation of the Son and the mighty power of the godhead (Three in One) in raising Him from the grave.

In Jonah’s case, however, “three” might suggest something more. When Joseph and Mary left Jerusalem in Luke 2, they traveled a day’s journey, mistakenly “supposing” that the Lord Jesus was in their company. As brethren often note, it took the sorrowing couple three days (v.46) to find Him again, leaving a lasting principle for us, that the way back generally takes longer than the journey away. Jonah’s flight after “paying the fare” may have equaled that of Joseph and Mary. If so, the trek back took three times longer. Sadly, many of us know through experience, the

reality of this. How dreadful those days of estrangement! What hatred it fostered towards anything that might hinder our communion with God!

O that near the Cross abiding,
We may to the Saviour cleave!
Naught with Him our hearts dividing,
All for Him content to leave.

-Walter Shirley

Surrendered by the Fish

When Jonah's recovery was complete, the fish "vomited" the prophet from its belly. "What an ignominious way," writes Warren Wiersbe, "for a distinguished prophet to arrive on shore! In chapter 1, the sailors treated Jonah like dangerous cargo to be thrown overboard, and now he's treated like a foreign substance to be disgorged from the fish's body" ("Be Amazed: Jonah"). The word "vomit" (qayah) has a violent connotation that is usually associated with disgust. It was as if the fish suddenly had enough of its human irritant and was anxious to be rid of it. "The language rather graphically suggests its haste to do so when it finally reached God's designated drop-off point" (Henry Morris: "The Remarkable Journey of Jonah"). The Lord threatened the Laodicean assembly with something similar: "So then, because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of My mouth" (Rev. 3:16). Israel too, was warned of God, to "keep all My statutes, and all My judgments, and do them: that the land, whither I bring you to dwell therein, spue you not out" (Lev.20:22). But fortunately in this portion, the man "spued" out was unhurt and a better person than when he was "swallowed up."

The Lord "spake unto the fish." That is, He "commanded" the creature to release Jonah and it responded instantly. Where Jonah surfaced is not certain, though it may have been near Joppa where he first got off track.

We do know, however, the condition of the place. We read the fish vomited out Jonah upon the "dry land." "Dry land" is what the children of Israel walked on when they crossed the Red Sea and later the Jordan River. It was stable ground that emboldened progress and inspired joy. "He turned the sea into dry land: they went through the flood on foot: there did we rejoice in Him" (Ps. 66:6). Thus, Jonah received a fresh start. No longer did the Lord's tempest sting his face and block his way. The wind was at his back now, so he could move confidently with God again, rather than in his own strength. It's bad business when believer's walk bereft of the Lord's approval. Every glance is furtive, every action faltering. How good to function as

David did before Goliath, "...I come to thee in the name of the Lord of hosts...This day will the Lord deliver thee into mine hand...that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel" (1 Sam. 17:45-46). Said Moses to his God, "If Thy presence go not with me, carry us not up hence" (Ex. 33:15).

May Jonah's hard-earned lesson be our lesson, and leave lasting impressions. Life is solemn, its issues urgent. How important that we walk "circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil" (Eph. 5:15-16).

(continued)

Earthen Vessels

Earthen vessels, marred, unsightly,
Bearing wealth no thought can know;
Heav'nly Treasure, gleaming brightly--
Christ revealed in saints below!

Vessels, broken, frail, yet bearing
Through the hungry ages on,
Riches giv'n with hand unsparing,
God's great Gift, His precious Son!

O to be but emptier, lowlier,
Mean, unnoticed and unknown,
And to God a vessel holier,
Filled with Christ, and Christ alone!

Naught of earth to cloud the glory!
Naught of self the light to dim!
Telling forth Christ's wondrous story,
Broken, empty--filled with Him!

Tr. Frances Bevan