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Jonah Part 4

Steve Walvatne

The Maelstrom

"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" (v. 4).

We noted previously Jonah's hostility towards heathen Nineveh. He cringed at the thought of witnessing to one of Israel's sworn enemies, and Jonah 4:2 tells us why. The prophet suspected God would spare its inhabitants and that possibility was loathsome to him. We're apt to disdain Jonah's mind set, until we transport his thinking to modern times as James Boice has in his book, *The Minor Prophets*. He writes, "...Imagine the word of the Lord coming to a Jew who lived in New York during World War II, telling him to go to Berlin to preach to Nazi Germany, and instead of this, he goes to San Francisco and takes a boat for Hong Kong." Put like that, we can better understand Jonah's attitude and actions. Yet, we reiterate, that God's servants are not at liberty to dispute divine prerogatives. If they do, serving ceases. "Jonah...was thinking of his own position, his own importance, of his own dignity and character as a prophet, forgetting that he was God's prophet" (J. A. v. Poseck: *The Bible Treasury*, v.17). The Lord suffered Jonah's insubordination for a time, and then mercifully intervened. A maelstrom ("turbulence" or "whirlpool") engulfed the boat accommodating Jonah, thus ending his wayward flight. In pondering this maelstrom, we'll see that

1. It was SENT
2. It was SUDDEN
3. It was SEVERE
4. It was SELECTIVE

5. It was SILENCED

It was SENT

"But the Lord sent out a great wind into the sea..." The Lord "blew" on Jonah's plans. He "hurled" or "cast" an unseen current at the sea so that the boat conveying Jonah rocked violently. In 1 Samuel 18:11, King Saul "cast" a javelin at David to smite him. That's the word here. This mighty maelstrom was "cast" from heaven, and unlike the erring prophet, it hastened to its appointed place. A spot at sea erupted, because that's where Jonah was. The "but" before Jonah in verse 3, now came up against the "but" before Jehovah in verse 4.

Jonah quickly discerned the storm's origin and objective. He knew Jehovah's chastening method with a disobedient Israel (e.g. Judg. 3:12; 4:1, 2; 6:1-2; 1 Kings 17:1). He also understood God's way with the wind (Ex. 15:10; Num. 11:31; Ps. 107:25 etc.). Thus, he *knew* the present whirlpool's prey, was none other than himself. He was guilty; he must go. No craft or crew, however strong or seasoned, could withstand Almighty God.

Disobedience still spawns self-inflicted storms. Christians cannot do as they please. Corrective winds of varying degrees and forms frequently assail saints that disobey God. But they come lovingly: *"For whom the LORD loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth"* (Heb. 12:6). If they don't come, leaving our rebellion unchecked, then we have reason to probe the validity of our faith. And "the closer [our] connection with [God], the more quick and immediate must always be the flashes of divine

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resentment...when [we] presume to resist the claims of the divine authority” (Patrick Fairbairn: *Jonah: His Life, Character, and Mission*). With increased responsibility comes increased accountability. “*Be not many teachers, my brethren, knowing that we shall receive greater judgment*” (Jas. 3:1, J.N.Darby).

It was SUDDEN

“*Sent out...*” The “hurled” maelstrom charged at Jonah. Verse 13 suggests the boat was near shore, perhaps not far from port. “The intent of the inspired narrator,” writes Douglas Stuart, “was probably to suggest that the events described in verses 4-16 took place rather soon after Jonah’s boarding the ship” (*Word Biblical Commentary*, v. 31). Had the crew any inkling that a storm so destructive loomed, then surely their plans would have changed. But it “*burst forth*” upon them, producing great fear.

Judgment, says Isaiah, is God’s strange work (28:21), not something He delights in. If any, however, slight His “longsuffering” spirit (2 Pet. 3:9), then judgment comes quickly. “*He, that being often reproved hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy*” (Prov. 29:1). Men may scoff, wondering, “*Where is the promise of His coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation*” (2 Pet. 3:4), but Scripture’s unwavering response is, “*He that shall come will come, and will not tarry*” (Heb. 10:37).

Today, our Lord’s chief interest is with those that gather in “house of God” character (1 Tim. 3:15). That’s where His judgment especially hovers. “Our Father-God does not pass over the failures of His people, but disciplines them in order that they may be careful to walk in obedience to His Word” (H.A. Ironside: *James, 1&2 Peter*). That discipline by its very nature, frequently catches the wandering saint off guard, thereby serving as a “wakeup call.” “*And if the righteous scarcely (“through much difficulty”) be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?*” (1 Pet. 4:18). “*It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God!*” (Heb. 10:31).

It was SEVERE

“*...A great wind into the sea...a mighty tempest into the sea...the ship was like to be broken.*” What a horrific storm! Sailors trembling! The ship groaning! Everything appearing lost. Twice in the span of verse 4, the Hebrew adjective “*gadol*” describes the storm’s wrath. There was a “*GREAT*” wind – a “*MIGHTY*” tempest. “*Gadol*” is frequent in Jonah, where it is translated “*great*” (1:2, 4, 12, 17; 3:2, 3), “*great-*

est” (3:5), “*mighty*” (1:4), “*exceedingly*” (1:16; 4:1), “*exceeding*” (4:6), and “*nobles*” (3:7) in our King James Version. Here it emphasizes intensity, like that illustrated in Psalm 107: “*...He commandeth, and raiseth the stormy wind, which lifteth up the waves thereof. They (the passengers) mount up to the heaven, they go down again to the depths: their soul is melted because of trouble. They reel to and fro, and stagger like a drunken man, and are at their wits end*” (vv.25-27).

Every believer has known personally the spiritual turmoil that conviction of sin brings. “Let a man be made alive to the truth that *the end of a sinful life is hell*...and there will be little wonder if he go supperless to bed, to spend the night-watches, not in peaceful slumber, but in fear and trembling, in tossing and groaning, in prayer and weeping” (George Cutting: *Light for Anxious Souls*). That inner turbulence forever transforms those that find peace in Christ. Regrettably, much that passes for conversion in our day, is bereft of this life changing experience. Multitudes cling to false claims, having never acknowledged their lost condition.

But believers are different. They enjoy “*the peace of God, which passeth all understanding*” (Php. 4:7), and are blessed with “*all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ*” (Eph.1:3). Yet, like Jonah, they can wander, sometimes bringing upon themselves the Lord’s corrective winds. “It is a great mercy to be recalled to God by tribulation, even if it be tempestuous in kind or degree” (R. Waldo Sibthorp: *Lectures on the Book of Jonah*).

It was SELECTIVE

“*...The ship was like to be broken.*” Did this maelstrom chiefly affect Jonah’s boat? It’s possible. “That ship and no other,” wrote Matthew Henry, “...was tossed more than any other and was more in danger.” George Young agrees, saying, “The tempest was particularly directed against the vessel that carried Jonah...here the storm vented all its fury; here the force of the winds was concentrated” (*Lectures on the Book of Jonah*). And Douglas Stuart says Jehovah “threw the wind at the sea around the ship.”

Something similar happened in Acts 16, where a “great earthquake” rattled a prison’s foundation (vv. 23-34). Whether these heaven-sent calamities affected surrounding areas is unknown. We do know, however, that they accosted particular persons, ending their willful ambitions. “*...God thundereth marvelously with His voice; great things doeth He, which we cannot comprehend...He causeth it to come, whether for correction, or for His land, or for mercy*” (Job 37:5, 13).

The greatest storm that ever occurred was at Calvary, and it was most selective. Darkness descended and a tempest of infinite magnitude broke upon the Lord Jesus. *“All Thy waves and Thy billows have gone over Me”* (Ps. 42:7). *“I sink in deep mire, where there is no standing: I am come into deep waters, where the floods overflow Me”* (Ps. 69:2). In that *“night season,”* the Lord Jesus suffered *“the Just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God”* (1 Pet. 3:18). *“For He hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him”* (2 Cor. 5:21).

*Alone upon the cross He hung
That others He might save;
Forsaken then by God and man,
Alone, His life He gave.*

*Alone, alone, He bore it all alone;
He gave Himself to save His own,
He suffered, bled, and died, alone, alone.*

-Ben H. Price

It was SILENCED

“...The sea ceased from her raging” (v.15). This miracle is similar to that recorded in Matthew 8:26-27, where the Savior calmed a tremendous tempest on the Sea of Galilee, causing His disciples to marvel and say, *“What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey Him?”* We read here that the sea *“wrought and was tempestuous”* (v.11, 13). It raged and increased in raging. But He that “hurled” the storm, hushed it, at the precise moment Jonah himself was “hurled” into the waters. With Jonah’s contrary course halted, the storm had fulfilled its purpose. *“Its object was gained and it had nothing further to do: here its commission ceased”* (George Young).

Again, we turn to Calvary and ponder the indescribable tempest calmed there. *“It is finished”* (Jn. 19:30) came the loud cry of the conquering Christ when the billows of divine judgment were fully quenched. Instantly, all the waves from out of the deeps (Ps. 88:6) quit their roaring forever. Individuals finding refuge in Christ and His finished work will never perish, because they’re eternally sheltered. But woe to those who reject this great work – *“...These shall go away into everlasting punishment”* (Matt. 25:46).

Perhaps some reader is reeling today from a storm in their life. Take heart, for no conflict is hidden from God, nor beyond His power to calm. If its purpose is restorative (and not all ill winds are, i.e. 1 Pet. 3:14), then may you like Jonah, own the sin and surrender

your soul to the merciful hand of God. His way is not painless, but it is perfect (Ps. 18:30), and sent for our benefit. The maelstrom that found out Jonah was undoubtedly a blessing in disguise. May all of us be exercised concerning these things.

**Our present trials are to prove our character,
perfect our graces, and us for the Master's use.
Through trial we shall lose dross, acquire solidity,
and take the impression of God's image.**

What is His Name? Jehovah-tsidkenu

Joel Portman

Jeremiah’s call by God to prophesy to the nation of Judah wasn't a call to an easy task, and he recognized the difficulties of it before he began his ministry (Jer. 1:4-8). Moses-like, (Ex. 3:11, 13; 4:1, 10) he protested his personal inability to carry out this important function and later in his ministry, he again complained about the experiences that were involved in his service for God (Jer. 20:7-18). Unto a nation that had sunk to a low level religiously, spiritually, morally and socially, he faithfully fulfilled his responsibilities, repeatedly preaching to a nation that was on the cusp of deportation under God's judgment. Thankfully, he fulfilled that ministry, even continuing those protestations against their sinfulness and departure from the Lord as they were determined to go into Egypt (Jer. 42).

Judah had been a righteous nation, but that was no longer the case. Isaiah spoke of God calling a righteous man from the east (Isa. 41:2), but that was Cyrus, king of Persia, and not Judah. Prov. 14:34 says, *“Righteousness exalteth a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people.”* The nation was characterized by violence (Jer. 20:8, Ezek. 7:23, 8:17, etc.), extortion (Ezek. 22:12), oppression of the people by kings and princes (Isa. 5:7, 59:13, Ezek. 22:6-7, 29), and evil that reigned on every hand. It was a most difficult time for a godly man like Jeremiah, along with others of like character, but his message contained the solution to the deliverance from imminent danger. It was to return to the principles that God had instituted in the beginning, to respond to God's call to the nation to *“do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God.”* (Micah 6:8). Those principles that delineate what God desires for His people (and for all nations) had never changed and never will. Those are principles that should prevail in the lives of every believer and in the actions and decisions of assemblies at every time. *“The righteous Lord loveth*

righteousness,” we read in Ps. 11:7, and when there is departure from those principles by any people, it is a dishonor to His character and person.

It is evident that the nation was degenerating, the kingdom had been corrupted, and God’s judgment was in the wings, waiting to be accomplished according to His promise.

“With the death of Josiah, the last of the godly kings, Judah’s day of grace had come to an end” (L. Strauss, *The Godhead*). “The history of the Judges appears to repeat itself here. Jehovah in His goodness and patience raised up pious and devout kings to succeed unrighteous, wicked kings, but it failed to arrest their downward trend” (N. Stone, *Names of God*). Despite the repeated warnings of God’s prophets whom He raised to the nation in His mercy, they derided, disregarded, and despised those faithful men. We learn that rejection or failure to observe God’s word and warnings will always result in God’s judgment rather than His blessing.

In the midst of those conditions, we read in Jer. 23:5-6 of that which God was anticipating and which He desires to see. “Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth. In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely: and this is his name whereby he shall be called, The LORD our Righteousness.” That title of Jehovah is a translation of “Jehovah-tsidkenu.” Knowing that the failing people would never fulfill that condition, He speaks of One who, in perfect righteousness, would fulfill His desires and accomplish His purposes, and who would, as a result, establish righteousness in the earth. Such a condition will not be realized world-wide until that “Righteous Branch” is raised unto David, a true Son of David, who will save Israel and bring in peace and safety. The world looks for such a man, though not thinking of our blessed Lord when they do. Believers know of and look for His coming to fulfill His purpose, and Israel will never know peace and safety until He returns and is acknowledged in His rightful authority.

Righteousness Defined

Righteousness derives its standard and character from God. Man is never perfectly righteous at best, though he might seek to attain to a high standard of always doing what is right regardless of circumstances or results. God is, by His nature, righteous, not only to a degree that far exceeds our righteousness, but of an entirely different character. Because He is holy in His person, perfectly wise in His decisions, and moving without regard for man’s opinions or standards but only in relation to Himself, He is completely capable of manifesting righteousness in all that He does. Ps. 11:7 declares, “For the righteous LORD loveth righteousness; his countenance doth behold the upright.”

Again, Ps. 7:9 says, “Oh let the wickedness of the wicked come to an end; but establish the just: for the righteous God trieth the hearts and reins.” Jeremiah speaks to God in 12:1: “Righteous art thou, O LORD, when I plead with thee; yet let me talk with thee of thy judgments: Wherefore doth the way of the wicket prosper? Wherefore are all they happy that deal very treacherously?” Scripture abounds with references to the righteousness of God in all that He is and does. Even the wicked king, Pharaoh, acknowledged, “The LORD is righteous,” (Ex. 9:27), but he failed to respond to that standard of righteousness in His own decisions.

“The word “tsidkenu” is derived from “ tsedek”--righteousness. It meant originally to be stiff or straight.” (N. Stone, *Names of God*). Its immediate derivation is from the meaning “justice, rightness, what is right or just” (BDB). Obviously as applied to God, it is a standard of righteousness that is absolute and from which He cannot deviate from in any of His acts. When men justify God, they are acknowledging His righteousness (Lk. 7:29), since they are declaring that He is righteous in every deed.

This word is found applied in various ways in the Bible. It is found in relation to the relationships of men with men. They are to be righteous in all that they do (Lev. 19:35, 26), and this should be true of all, especially of Christians. It is also used to determine the judgments of those who have authority, as in Deut. 16:18, Isa. 5:23, and this should also characterize believers individually or assembly judgments. We can act toward others unrighteously when we pass judgment on their character or actions without knowing the absolute truth or if we fail to seek to ascertain the truth of a matter before reacting.

This word is also used to describe responsibilities toward God either religiously or spiritually. Israel failed to render to God what He was due and desired to receive from them, failing to recognize His greatness and authority. The Lord called on them to offer the sacrifices of righteousness and they failed to render unto the LORD what He should receive from all men (Ps. 4:5, 51:17-19). This was the result of their own unrighteousness and manifested their disregard for the place of Jehovah in their midst.

L. Strauss says that “Before the sixteenth century, our word righteousness was written, “rightwiseness,” and it meant “one who is as he ought to be. When Adam came from the hand of God, he was as he ought to be, and there was no sin in him. . . but when he fell through sin he was no longer what he ought to be. He was not “rightwise” but he became unrighteous.” “Now in the sight of God only One is righteous, the Lord Jesus Christ. He only is what He ought to be, thus of Him only could the Father say, “*This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.*”” (Mt. 3:17).

Righteousness Declared

Only One who was perfectly righteous with the ability

to act on God's part could satisfy those requirements so that through His perfect work, unrighteous ones could be declared righteous by God. This brings us to our Lord Jesus, who fulfilled every requirement of God on our part. Being unrighteous in ourselves, none could give to God a ransom for his own soul, nor redeem his brother (Ps. 49:7). We could only take up what will be the future confession of the repentant remnant of Israel expressed in Isa. 64:6, when longing for God's deliverance, yet recognizing their own unrighteousness that prevents them from meeting God in their sins. *"But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags . . ."* Sadly, this is not the ground the majority will take then, nor is it the position of most people today. Man seeks to declare his own righteousness, as Paul says in Rom. 10:3, *"For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God."*

The law clearly could never make a sinner righteous. It did have the ability on God's part to condemn all unrighteousness in men, as in Rom. 3:19 *"Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law; that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God."* And yet it was in the law and the prophets that God declared His righteousness to forgive and justify the guilty, but only on the ground of the satisfactory work of Christ, conveying on the guilty a righteousness which is apart from law entirely (Rom. 3:21-24). That work declared God's righteousness in passing over sins of those under the law (Rom. 3:25).

God's righteousness is manifested and upheld in Christ, providing for Him a perfectly just ground upon which He can clear the guilty and justify the condemned. He is that righteous One (Rom. 5:18-19) who in obedience to God accomplished a righteous work at the cross to provide "justification of life." It is through His work on the cross that unrighteous sinners can be declared righteous. It is an error to think that there is an imputation of righteousness to men based on the righteous life of Christ. Believers derive no value from His life; as it has been taught by others, our relation with Christ is found in the cross, though His perfect life proved our Lord to be the suited One who could, as the Lamb of God, *"bear away the sins of the world."* (Jn. 1:29). The teaching that there is a quantity of merit derived from the life and death of Christ in all its purity and holiness (as well as that of Mary and other saints) that a church can dispense to others is a fallacy in every part. This may be called "The Treasury of the Church" but it is really contrary to the Scriptures of truth. It is the righteous work of Christ at the cross that alone has the ability to justify the guilty.

Nor is the sinner "made" righteous, but rather, in a legal sense, he is "imputed, or reckoned righteous" before God. That is not a righteousness that is attained by man's self-righteous acts or attempts to achieve, but rather it is the declaration of God to the one who believes in Jesus (Rom.

3:26, 4:5, 10:10). It is available to all (Rom. 3:22) but only enjoyed by those who receive it through faith alone. It is the blessed privilege of everyone who is saved to be *"justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus."* (Rom. 3:24).

It was only in the cross-work of Christ that God's righteous, holy standard could be upheld (Rom. 3:22, 25-26) and declare, or demonstrate, God's righteous, not only in justifying sinners in the present, but also in passing over (overlooking) sins committed under the dispensation of law (Rom. 3:25) that were forgiven (Lev. 4:20, 26, 31, 35) on the basis on the guilty one's sacrifices that anticipated Christ's work to fulfill them. We revel in the rich blessing of being found before God, completely justified from all guilt and cleansed from all sin (1 Jn. 1:7).

*"Done is the work that saves,
Once and forever done;
Finished the righteousness,
That clothes the unrighteous one.
The love that blesses us below
Is flowing freely to us now."*

Horatius Bonar

Righteousness Displayed

The result of being justified freely in Christ is that those recipients should display practical righteousness in their lives. They are to live holy lives, free from the constant practice of sin. John declares (1 Jn. 3:7), *"Little children let no man deceive you: He that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous."* Again in Eph. 5:9, Paul says, *"For the fruit of the Spirit (or light) is in all goodness and righteousness and truth."* God's Word condemns any idea that a Christian can or would live a life of unrighteousness. It is contrary to God's character, the result of the new birth, the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit, and the results that a consideration of God's Word produce in one's life. One who practices unrighteousness is not born of God, according to John's declaration (1 Jn. 3:10). It is the exercise of every genuine child of God to live holy lives that display practical righteousness before others and before God (Rom. 12:1-2; Eph. 1:4; 1 Pet. 1:16). May we continue to uphold that teaching and manifest its reality in our lives for His honor until He comes.

Righteousness Rewarded

The Scriptures cause us to realize that there will be a reward for righteous living at the Judgment Seat of Christ. We would not live thus in order to gain reward, but the Lord will reward all who have been exercised in this way. We read of a "crown of righteousness" that Paul anticipated receiving along with all others who love His appearing (2 Tim. 4:8). Those who truly love His appearing are the ones who seek to conform their lives to His purpose as they longingly anticipate that moment of His return. That is an

incorruptible crown (1 Cor. 9:25) for those who maintain control over self and the body so as to honor their Lord and not be disqualified by ignoring or breaking the rules (1 Cor. 9:27). We read that *“the grace of God. . . teacheth us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world; looking for that blessed hope and glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ; who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.”* (Tit. 2:11-14).

So that He who Jeremiah saw from a distance is the very same One who has come to be “our righteousness” (1 Cor. 1:30), and what we enjoy presently as justified ones will be eventually known universally when He comes and establishes righteousness in the earth. What a day that will be!

*“He shall come down as showers
Upon the fruitful earth;
And love, joy, hope, like flowers,
Spring in His path to birth;
Before Him on the mountains
Shall peace, the herald go;
And righteousness in fountains
From hill to valley flow.*

James Montgomery

If we are really growing in grace, we shall feel our need of Christ more and more each day; and we shall make more use of Christ every day, until at last it will be, “I am nothing, Christ is all.”

Church Truth: Christ’s Body

W. Fisher Hunter

“Ye are (the) body of Christ” 1 Cor. 12:27

Of the many figures used to express what the Church is, none shows forth the greatness of God’s blessing to the believer in this age as does this one. When Saul of Tarsus made havoc of the Church our Lord showed His identity, union and oneness with it by His words, *“Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?”* (Acts 9:4). This union is seen in, and illustrated by the marriage relationship. When God made woman and brought her to Adam to become his wife the twain became one flesh — and God called their name Adam, not Adams. The same thing is true of the Church—Christ’s body and Christ—together they are called “the Christ.” *“For as the body is one and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is the Christ.”* 1 Cor. 12:12.

I. Its Oneness

This is a prominent feature of the body (both universal and local, ed.). *“There is one body.”* (Eph. 4:5, Rom. 12:5; Col. 3:15). Caiaphas prophesied this oneness when he said, *“That Jesus should die for that nation; and not for that nation only, but that He should gather together in one the children of God.”* (John 11:52). Our Savior prayed for it, (John 17:11-21). This oneness was made on the day of Pentecost. *“For by one Spirit were we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles.”* (1 Cor. 12:13). It was then that believers were united to one another, and collectively were joined to Christ in heaven; thus becoming His body. and He the head. The Holy Spirit is the connecting link in every respect, not faith as some suppose.

Israel as a nation composed of twelve tribes was one kingdom. In course of time it divided becoming two kingdoms. Never in the practical sense were they one again. Nevertheless, their oneness was constantly seen in the temple by the twelve loaves (each loaf represented a tribe) which were always together on the table of shewbread. Just so the oneness of an assembly is constantly declared in the Lord’s supper by the one loaf upon the table. *“The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we being many are one loaf and one body: for we are all partakers of that one loaf.”* (1 Cor. 10:16-17). A denial of this oneness is seen in the innumerable sects and denominations of Christendom calling themselves Christian bodies.

Danger of False Unity

The desire for unity seems inherent in every Christian. This is a good thing, but it has difficulties and dangers. In uniting, mutual concessions usually have to be made. The danger is in getting unity at the expense of setting aside truth and being indifferent to practical godliness. This kind of unity, so-called, is easily effected and is much in evidence today; for it tries nobody’s conscience and allows everybody’s will. This kind of unity is all the more dangerous because it is connected with the truth of One body; because it seems to be associated with a true desire for the good of all God’s people, therefore plausible; then, not to fall in with it is to be branded as narrow, rigid or sectarian. Our responsibility is not to be made a unity, but rather to manifest one already made. Eph. 4:2. This we can do by gathering unto Christ alone. *“Let us go forth unto Him without the camp.”* (Heb. 13:13). *“Where two or three are gathered in (unto) my name, there am I in the midst.”* (Matt. 18:20). Thus rejecting all names, creeds and barriers that help divide God’s people. In Christ only is there enough to attract, gather and hold together God’s people. Another way of manifesting this unity is by embracing in our affections every child of God, and by receiving, in a godly, scriptural way, into the local assembly fellowship all who give evidence that they have been born again and are not scriptural-

ly debarred because of moral evil (1 Cor. 5:11), doctrinal error (1 Tim. 1:19, 20), or wilful association with such as mentioned in 2 John verse 10.

II. Its Membership

This may be seen from the following scriptures. “*Ye are (the) body of Christ and members in particular.*” “*But God hath set the members in the body as it hath pleased Him.*” (1 Cor. 12:18, 27). How privileged is the child of God that his body is a member of Christ (1 Cor. 6) and that he himself is a member of Christ’s body and the local assembly. When this blessedness is apprehended by him, how easy it becomes to refuse other inferior unscriptural memberships. The idea of being a member of a church in the organization sense, whether it be denomination, mission, meeting or congregation, is not found in Scripture. What a rebuke this is to the worldly churches whose chief glory is in the membership and whose continual aim so to increase it. The increase is usually gotten at the expense of setting aside truth and godliness.

This spirit of wanting to be large is finding an entrance among some of God’s assemblies and they have become like Israel of old who wanted to be like the nations around. They have the idea that power lies in quantity. With the world it does but, in spiritual things, power lies in quality. The result of desiring to be large, may lead to accommodating worldly methods to make professions, coupled with setting aside the truth of reception, or in lowering the standard for those being received.

In the membership there is variety. Not in the sexual, racial or social sense, for we read that in the body, “*There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female, for ye are all in Christ Jesus.*” (Gal. 3:28). The variety found in the body is in office or gift, as may be seen from the following scriptures: “*For as we have many members in one body and all members have not the same office: so we being many are one body in Christ.*” (Rom. 12:4). “*If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing.*” Further, we read of “feeble” and “less honorable” members, (1 Cor. 12:22, 23). Failure to see this and recognize it has been harmful to the Church. Many seem to think that every member should see, feel and act alike. There are no twins in God’s family. The Corinthians were guilty of this—so the apostle says are all apostles? are all teachers? etc. (1 Cor. 12:29). Certainly not, there is variety: may we all recognize this in the members set in the body by God’s sovereign wisdom and will.

III. Its Functioning

We have seen that the body is one, yet is composed of many members in which is variety in reference to office, gift and function. We are now to look at the body functioning (in the local assembly). In this respect, the responsibility on all is that of mutual dependence. This is seen in the fact

that we are “*members one of another.*” It is stated in the words “*That the members should have the same care one for another.*” “*Nay much more those members of the body which seem to be more feeble are necessary*” 1 Cor. 12:22. How sadly the Church has failed to manifest this. Where and how may this failure be seen?

The Monopolizing Member

When any of the religious organizations of Christendom are in session, one member of the congregation is very prominent. He may be termed the pastor, the minister, the Father, the doctor, or the superintendent, etc. He acts as the head. He does all the leading in prayer, all the teaching of the scriptures, all the preaching, exhorting, and pastoring of the flock. By so acting he is virtually saying to the congregation “I have no need of you.” He does this notwithstanding the scriptures plainly warn against it. See 1 Cor. 12:21. “*And the eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need of you, nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you.*” We may term this sin that of despising. The one who does it is usurping the responsibility of others and may be termed a monopolizer. The sad thing about this failure is that it is not confined to the religious organizations. It has crept in and has manifested itself among God’s people who bear character worthy of being called an assembly of God. “Diotrephes who loveth to have the pre-eminence” is an example of this, (3 John 9).

The Discontented Member

Another thing we are warned against in connection with the body functioning is discontent. “*If the foot shall say, because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body?*” (1 Cor. 12:15). This discontent is seen in that member who, knowing that he is not gifted to function as a teacher, evangelist, exhorter, ruler, etc., all prominent functions, concludes that he has no part to play in the life and activity of the body. All such are mistaken. Let them hearken to Scripture, “*But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal.*” “*Nay those members of the body which seem to be more feeble are necessary.*” (1 Cor. 12:7, 22, Rom. 12:4, 6; 1 Pet. 4:10; Matt. 25:14, 30). To think otherwise is next to saying that God has placed a member in the body that is unnecessary to it. The cure for this discontent is found in every one acknowledging the will and wisdom of God who “*set the members in the body as it hath pleased Him.*” (1 Cor. 12:18). The thing for everyone to do is to find out his place then function and be content therein.

The Unlively Member

Again, one may know his function and not be active in it. The cause may be mental indolence, fleshly indulgence, worldliness, or minding of earthly things. These things are destructive to godly exercise. Let such an one know that the

Assembly is the loser by his failure, for it is *“by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body.”* (Eph. 4:16).

The Disorderly Member

In closing, we would mention another disorder often seen in the assembly when functioning. It is found in that person who, having not the gift or grace to act as a teacher, preacher, exhorter, etc., will so act. Where this is allowed to go on, it is a source of trouble and friction. It is one of the causes of the saints of God absenting themselves from the meetings. It has been the means of emptying many a hall. Indeed, some make this their plea for going outside of the assembly to hear denominational preachers in quest of food. They say they get no spiritual food in the assembly. We do not justify such in their act for it simply adds to the disorder. The proper thing to do is to correct the disorder and provide food for the flock. Let those who have responsibility in the house of God in ruling in it, see to it that this disorder is corrected, by disciplining such a person who continues to act in a capacity for which he is not fitted, and of which he knows the assembly disapproves. The assembly may rid itself of this affliction by sharply rebuking such an one and if need be closing his mouth (Titus 1:11, 13). Such is God’s wise provision for the good of His people, and the maintenance of Godly order in His house.

If Christ will not be satisfied with His present glory at the right hand of God without having His Church, the members of His body, with Him, how can we be content without Him in this valley of the shadow of death, this present evil world?

Happenings in Bethany, pt. 3

Gelson Villegas

(from “La Sana Doctrina” #311, Jan/Feb. 2011)

In the first scene mentioned in Bethany we see the Lord as the One who teaches believers. In the second, He is the One who gives life to the dead, and now coming to John 12, we find Him as the One who gives to His own an opportunity to serve and honor Him. In this way, what happened in Bethany is very important, according to John 12, and this will occupy our close attention in this article.

The first verse of chapter 12 tells us that *“Jesus six days before the passover came to Bethany, where Lazarus was,”* and this indicates to us that Lazarus had not gone to another

place to begin his new resurrected life, but that he stayed in the place where he was well-known, to be a living, actual testimony to the power of the Lord. Also, the Holy Spirit has seen fit to point out that Lazarus was one very specifically identified (surely there were others in Bethany who had the same name). So this has to do with *“Lazarus . . . which had been dead, whom he raised from the dead.”* Without doubt, we see the truth that every saved one will carry the indelible personality that gives evidence of the saving and transforming power of the Lord.

“There they made him a supper,” (12:2) is a reference, somewhat unusual, because from the Divine side, the sinner is invited to satisfy himself at the great supper God provides. However, we cannot forget that the publican Levi (Matthew) also *“made him a great feast in his own house,”* (Luke 5:29). Undoubtedly, there is in all this an expression of appreciation and profound gratitude for the One who has satisfied our souls. In the same way, we note the solemn truth that the affections of Christ are satisfied in the banquet of love and gratitude that His own give to Him. Maybe this might be the precious truth that we find in the letter to the Ephesians, but in a corporate sense, when we read that the “body” (the church) is the *“fulness of him that filleth all in all,”* (Eph. 1:23). It is the spouse inviting him, *“Let my beloved come into his garden, and eat his pleasant fruits”* (Song 4:16), because there are *“all manner of pleasant fruits new and old,”* as she expresses it in (7:13).

When this tells us that on this occasion, *“Martha served”* (12:2), it isn’t strange to our understanding, since it is evident that this believer’s heart was directed toward serving. The most beautiful thing here is that her service is now directly in relation to the Beloved Redeemer (remember that the supper was for Him), and not in relation to the domestic endeavors as at the first time. The Judgment Seat of Christ will display how much appreciation He has even for the smallest service that is done out of love for His Name.

“Lazarus was one of them that sat at the table with him,” (12:2). Yes, he was one among many, but distinguished from them, because no reference is made of any of the rest. Without doubt, the raised ones are named especially as those who experience the blessing of the table of His fellowship and to eat the delicious food of His provision. Lazarus could even say, *“Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of my enemies,”* (Ps. 23:5), because around him there were also gathered the chief priests who were thinking evil thoughts against him and against the Lord who raised him.

We don’t know if Lazarus preached at all, but only that Lazarus *“was one of them that sat at the table. . .”* and a *“much people of the Jews . . . came. . . that they might see Lazarus,”* and that *“because by reason of him many of the Jews went away, and believed on Jesus,”* (12:9, 11). There is no room to doubt that a holy life of faithful testimony to

the life in Christ has more power than a thousand sermons by some eloquent preacher. Certainly, words move some people, but acts win many others.

“*Sat at the table,*” we believe doesn’t only suggest a position of repose and rest, but a privileged place at the table with the King. In another miracle of raising the dead, the case of the daughter of Jairus, when she was returned to life, the Lord “*commanded that something should be given her to eat.*” (Mark 5:43). In this way, those who are given life “eat” and, according to our understanding, Lazarus was seated before those delicious provisions, recovering from the involuntary fast that he suffered during the time that death had power over him. In this respect, we have reason to doubt very much the salvation of those that profess, if they don’t desire the feast of the Word of God. Everyone that is born again has the desire, as a new-born babe, for the spiritual milk that is pure and unadulterated, as we read in 1 Pet. 2:2.

Lazarus’ case reminds us of Mephibosheth in the Old Testament (2 Sam. 9). He was a descendent of Saul’s family, an enemy of David, and even more, he was lame in his feet. However, David, out of his mercy, wanted that man to eat always at his table in Jerusalem. If we identify ourselves with Lazarus (raised, seated, privileged and fed), we might have much in which to glory. But if we associate ourselves with Mephibosheth (descendent of David’s enemy and, sadly, lame from his infancy), we have much to discourage us. When we celebrate the Lord’s Supper both cases can affect the quality of the meeting and our worship. If we only consider our many privileges, we could be caused to have vain-glory. That possibility is corrected when we see the merits and glories of our beloved Savior and when we remember that we have nothing that we have not received by grace. On the other hand, to consider only our defects and limitations (without seeing them through the lenses of His grace and redemption), will give Satan the terrible weapon of discouragement, to produce in us a defeated and frustrated spirit.

Following this, the evangelist John goes on to narrate the participation of Mary in that event. And the devotional expression of this believer is of great importance, in so much that the Holy Spirit has wanted to give us detail after detail, every one of immense value in itself and, at the same time, every part as an invaluable piece in order to have the total depiction of what should be a perfect picture of adoration and devotion.

The first detail is the quantity of the offering, because “*Mary took a pound of ointment . . .*” (v. 3), something very small in comparison, for example, with the 100 pounds of myrrh and aloes that Nicodemus brought to the burial of the Crucified One’s body (John 19:39). But we firmly believe that the pound of perfume that Mary brought was evaluated by the same divine appreciation and followed the same pattern that the Lord applied to the offering of the poor widow. She, out of her poverty, cast into the ark of the

offerings much more than the ostentatious rich men, because the two coins represented all that she had. Oh brother, sister, out of your poverty, your limitations, from your deficient worship, offer your all to the Lord from your heart, and He will value it from the viewpoint of his full knowledge and the open hand of His goodness.

Next, this speaks to us of the specificity of that offering, because it clearly expresses that the ointment was of *nard*. In relation to this detail, many times when we celebrate the Lord’s Supper, there isn’t much clarity concerning the nature of that meeting, because someone rises in “worship” and can only refer to his past life and from where the Lord delivered him. Other ones (how incredible it seems) use the opportunity to throw a little stone at someone, and some think it is the moment to display their best flowery language, but it is only rhetoric empty of devotion or of Biblical content. This can take any form but, specifically, this is not worship.

Therefore, we have the quality of that perfume that is emphasized. It is nard, yes, but *pure nard*, without addition of any other element that would alter its special purity. It is sad that many times the offering of our worship is saturated with pride, or mixed with thoughts of different interests that, even if legitimate, denature and put a blemish on true devotion. More than this, to have and feed on impure thoughts when the saints celebrate the Lord’s Supper, is a sin that causes one to eat and drink judgment to himself, since such an impure mixture prevents us from discerning the Lord’s body.

(to be continued)

There is nothing so teaching as walking with God; nothing so sifting to the heart and conscience as seeking in all things to walk before Him; to hear, to speak, and to act for one great end, namely, to please God, and to do His will from the heart.

R. C. Chapman

The Model Believer in the House of God

Richard Jeffrey
(AT May/June 1980)

“*These things write I unto thee, hoping to come unto thee shortly : But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.*”

1 Tim. 3:14,15.

That two letters were written by Paul to his “true child in the faith,” Timothy, emphasizes the importance of being a member of the house of God, and what is expected of one claiming such membership,

“*Be thou an example (model, J.N.D.) of the believers*” 1 Tim. 4:12, is the exhortation, and then follows the details of that which, in practice, is characteristic of a model believer in the house of God. It was not only for the guidance of Timothy that Paul gave these instructions but for “*faithful men, such as shall be competent to instruct others also.*” 2 Tim. 2:2 (J.N.D.).

As the church of God is the predominant subject in the New Testament it would be strange indeed if God had given no word as to the behavior of the members of it, and if there were no word of guidance given us and those within the house behaved themselves as they pleased the result would be disorder, both to the discomfort of other members and dishonor to the Owner and Builder of the house.

The “house of God” is not a synonym for a religious building, but refers to the “*habitation of God through the Spirit*” (Eph. 2:22). It is to take character from God Himself, and He is “*not the author of confusion (disorder), but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints.*” (1 Cor. 14:33). For peace we must have order; for order we must have rule; for rule we must have authority; and for authority we must have supremacy. Therefore, it is where Christ’s Lordship is acknowledged in a practical manner that tranquility, harmony, and spiritual effectiveness is known. Elders have the responsibility of instructing the local assembly as to conduct suited to the house of God. It may seem tedious at times, and one may feel repetitive in putting these things before the younger ones as generation succeeds generation. Of old time, the fathers in Israel were to be well instructed in the ways of God, so that when their children questioned them, for example, about the passover, Ex. 12:26, or “*when thy son asketh thee in time to come, saying, What mean the testimonies, and the statutes and the judgements, which the Lord our God hath commanded you,*” (Deut. 6:20); and “*what mean ye by these stones?*” (Josh. 4:6,21), the fathers were not to be evasive, but “*ye shall let your children know*” (Josh. 4:22).

It is sometimes difficult to get younger Christians to accept the scriptural description of the church of God, with their minds often clouded by the ecclesiastical image common to the average person. The servants of Christ must state and restate the truths in connection with the church even if they feel the saints know these things already.

The passing on of “these things” was not only for Timothy in his day but for such as would maintain a continuity of testimony down the centuries, and in the goodness of God there are still with us those who “*continue in the things which thou hast learned and has been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them.*” (2 Tim. 3:14).

It is not coincidence that these things were primarily addressed to a young man who was not to let anyone make light of him on account of his youthfulness, although he was told to show respect to elders as is fitting behavior in a well-ordered house. (1 Tim. 5:1).

Much as the young are to be loved and helped they must not be allowed to run the house as they wish, but submit, as Peter says, to the elders, giving an ear to their counsel but not giving elders advice. “*Ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another.*” (1 Peter 5:5). In such an atmosphere of subjection one to another quarreling would be almost unknown. The modern worldly nonsense of ‘self-expression’ should not animate Christians. Let us rather seek to set forth within the house of God as without, the blessed Savior, characterized by His meek and lowly walk, and glad obedience to His Father’s will.

Sisters have their special place in the house of God, although it is not the public place. When Paul writes of prayer in the house of God, for example, it is the men who are to engage in this audibly, (1 Tim. 2:8). The sisters, in response to the Divine ordering, will be content to remain “in quietness.” There are some wholesome lessons for us in this, especially in the atmosphere of the world around us where ‘equality’ is the watchword. We do not set aside the order of God without disastrous results, results which we are able to see all around us.

The ministry of sisters is exercised with quiet dignity characteristic of true godliness. The spirit of “the restless world that wars below” can so easily find its way into the assembly, and some may, thereby clamor for a place God has not assigned them with consequent discontent and agitation disturbing the happy fellowship of the saints.

There is no suggestion anywhere in the New Testament that what the Spirit-inspired writers have given us would ever need to be up-dated, sub-edited or blue-penciled! That men would tamper with the Word of God we have been warned, and in its place they would turn to fables, (2 Tim. 4:3-4), but we are to keep that which has been delivered unto us, and let it be our guide in all matters affecting our conduct in the house of God in its local assembly setting.

The present avalanche of versions of the Holy Bible has been instrumental in causing a good deal of confusion, with one result being that many younger believers are unable to quote a text correctly, let alone memorize a favorite portion. This is to be deplored.

Let us give good heed to the apostle’s parting words to the elders of Ephesus: “*I commend you to God, and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified.*” (Acts 20:32). It is the application of the word of God to our lives that sanctifies. (John 17:17), and sanctification is practical holiness which, says the Psalmist, “*becometh thine house, O Lord, for ever.*” (Psalm 93:5).