

Malcolm's Monday Musings : 6 December 2021.

Greetings.

This is my 'Monday Musings' email.

Last week, I included a meditation ('The Power of His Word') which, as I said at the time, was 'on the long side'.

I would like to think that all those who read it through thoughtfully were able to say at the close, in the words of apostles of old, 'We have seen the Lord' (John 20. 25; cf. vv. 18, 20).

You will find below this week's shorter 'Musings'.

Happy reading.

Yours in our Lord Jesus,

Malcolm

(i) Scripture.

The word of the Lord came unto Jonah ... saying, 'Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it' ... But Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish ...

The word of the Lord came unto Jonah the second time, saying, 'Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it ...'. So Jonah arose, and went unto Nineveh ...

God repented of the evil, that He had said that He would do unto them; and He did it not. But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was very angry.

And he prayed unto the Lord, and said, 'I pray thee, O Lord, was not this my saying, when I was yet in my country? Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish: for I knew that Thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest Thee of the evil'.

Jonah 1. 1-3; 3. 1-3; 3. 10b-4. 2 (*King James Version*)

(ii) Food for thought.

'Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the Lord' (Jonah 1. 3).

As I see it, Jonah's reason for running away ('fleeing' from the presence of the Lord, Jonah 1. 3, 10) was not:

- (i) because he was intimidated by the magnitude of the task set before him, even though the commission was simply breath-taking (Jonah 1. 2);
- (ii) because he feared for his own safety, even though the Assyrians were notoriously brutal and cruel;
- (iii) because he feared for his own reputation as a prophet, even though nobody wants to be known as a person who sounds warning of a judgement which never materialises (cf. Deut. 18. 22);
- (iv) because he feared that God Himself would be charged with being fickle and changeable; nor
- (v) because Nineveh was a Gentile city; Jonah's concern for the well-being of the heathen mariners (Jonah 1. 11-12) makes this most unlikely.

I suggest that Jonah's dislike for the people of Nineveh stemmed entirely from the city's status as the capital of Assyria. Israel had already suffered badly at the hand of Assyria and, although in Jonah's day the Empire was relatively weak, it still represented a major threat to Israel's future prosperity and blessing.

It was, therefore, for Jonah a question, not of what they were (Gentiles). but of who they were (Assyrians). If I am correct, Jonah's reason for fleeing lay in his love for his own nation rather than in hatred for other nations in general.

Jonah had earlier foretold that God was to *save Israel* by the hand of Jeroboam II (2 Kings 14. 25) and he had no intention of being the one by whose preaching God was to *save the capital of Assyria!* In his eyes, such a deliverance would doubtless result in the loss of all the land which he prophesied would be recovered by Jeroboam ... not to speak of the loss of the northern kingdom of Israel itself, which indeed it did about 40 years later.

The Lord Jesus made it clear that the 'sign' of Jonah played no small part in bringing Nineveh to its knees before God:

As the crowds pressed on Him, He began to say, 'This is an evil generation. It seeks a sign, and there shall no sign be given it, but the sign of Jonah the prophet. For as Jonah became a sign to the Ninevites, so shall also the Son of man be to this generation' (Luke 11. 29-30).

That is, Jonah's three-day experience in the stomach of the great fish was the occasion of Nineveh's faith in his message in much the same way as our Lord's own three-day experience of death and resurrection was to provide the convincing sign of the truth of His message.

It follows, therefore, that, if the prophet had not been swallowed and later disgorged by the fish, *he would not have been a 'sign' to anyone of anything ... and consequently Nineveh would have had no reason to repent.*

Here lies one of the main twists to the story about the great fish (the twist in 'the tail', we might say). Because the reason that Jonah enjoyed the great fish's hospitality for three days lay in his own disobedience.

I conclude, therefore, that (in the outworking of His sovereign purpose) the Lord must have overruled Jonah's very waywardness and disobedience to bring about the repentance of Nineveh and thereby its deliverance!

We know from the opening of Jonah's prayer at the beginning of the last chapter that, when the Lord had first commissioned him to 'cry against' Nineveh, Jonah had suspected that God planned to use him as His appointed means of sparing 'that great city' from its well-deserved destruction (Jonah 4. 2). But what Jonah never imagined in his wildest dreams was just how God was to bring this about.

The prophet had been well and truly outmanoeuvred by the God whose gracious purpose he had attempted to frustrate!

[We may well compare how the very actions which Joseph's brothers took to frustrate the fulfilment of his dreams (Gen. 37. 5-20) set in motion a series of events which, in accordance with God's purpose and timing, led to the fulfilment of those same dreams (Gen. 42. 6-9)!]

(For more detailed comments, see, 'The Prophecy of Jonah', The Minor Prophets (Precious Seed Publications), pages 106-107, 111-112.)

'The finger of God': ten plagues and ten commandments.

'It is interesting to note that the ten plagues in Egypt were accomplished by "the finger of God" (Exod. 8. 19) and that the ten commandments were written with "the finger of God" (Exod. 31. 18)'.

(J. B. Nicholson Jr, 'Can You Count to Ten', Uplook Ministries: Taste and See, 1 December 2021.)

A personal relationship: 'to myself' ... 'to the Lord' ... 'to Himself' ... 'to God'.

(i) 'I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself' (Exod. 19. 4).

(ii) 'All that dwelt at Lydda and Saron ... turned to the Lord' (Acts 9. 35).

(iii) 'All things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself by Jesus Christ' (2 Cor. 5. 18).

(iv) 'Christ also has once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God' (1 Pet. 3. 18).

'John tried to prevent Him ... but Jesus ... said to him, "Permit it to be so now"' (Matt. 3. 14-15).

'His submission to the will of God in His baptism carried with it His submission to that same will in His death. He identified Himself with a repentant people in His baptism, but they were a repentant people because they were a sinful people.

John might think it strange that He should wish to do so, but this foreshadowed that stranger and deeper identification of Himself with a sinful people which gives His death its blessed meaning for all believers'.

(F. F. Bruce, 'The Baptism of Christ', Co-ordinate Magazine, Spring 1961, page 8.)

'He that is ... against'.

'While He was rebuking the Pharisees, whom worldliness had set in opposition to Him, He uses a very solemn form of words: "He that is not with me is against me" (Matt. 12. 30).

But when He is alluding to those who owned Him and loved Him, but who needed further strength of faith or measure of light, so as to be in full company with Him, He spoke in other terms: "He that is not against us is for us" (Luke 9. 50)'.

(J. G. Bellett, 'The Moral Glory of the Lord Jesus Christ', page 70.)

'On this account the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it again' (John 10. 17).

'There are affections between the Father and the Son into which it is impossible for us to enter. The Father loved the Son before the world's foundation, but we cannot enter into that love. The character of the love, as well as its degree, is altogether beyond us.

But here the Lord speaks of the Father's love to Him in a way which we can, in measure, enter into. If the Father loves Him because He laid down His life that He might take it again, I think we may say with all reverence that we love Him for the same reason.

(C. A. Coates, 'The Father's Love', in The Food of Life, page 91).

Six references in the New Testament epistles to 'the God of peace'.

(i) 'Now the God of peace be with you all' (Rom. 15. 33).

(ii) 'And the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly' (Rom. 16. 20).

(iii) 'Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you' (2 Cor. 13. 11).

(iv) 'Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you' (Phil. 4. 9).

(v) 'And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ' (I Thess. 5. 23).

(vi) 'Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep ... make you perfect in every good work to do His will (Heb. 13. 20-21).

'My peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you' (John 14. 27).

'When the world gives anything it has to part with what it gives; but He says: "Not as the world giveth, give I unto you". He brings us into the enjoyment of everything that He has'.

(J. N. Darby, 'Christ is all and in all', Food for the Flock (1878), page 37).

Paul's letter to the Galatians: 'vital issues in the church today'.

'There were three main points at issue between Paul and the Judaizers, and they are still vital issues in the church today.

The first is the question of authority: how do we know what and whom to believe or disbelieve?

The second is the question of salvation: how can we get right with God, receiving the forgiveness of our sins and being restored to His favour and fellowship?

The third is the question of holiness: how can we control the sinful desires of our fallen nature and live a life of righteousness and love?

Addressing himself to these questions, Paul devotes approximately the first two chapters of the Epistle to the question of authority, chapters 3 and 4 to the question of salvation, and chapters 5 and 6 to the question of holiness'.

(John Stott, 'Only One Way: The Message of Galatians', page 185.)

'The city ... the length and the breadth and height of it are equal' (Rev. 21. 16).

'The cube is symbolic: there is only one cube in the Old Testament, and that is the Most Holy Place of the temple [1 Kings 6. 20], where only the priest could enter once a year, bearing blood for his own sins and for the sins of the people.

'Now the entire city is the Most Holy Place: in the consummation, all of God's people are perennially in the unshielded splendour of His glorious presence'.

(D. A. Carson, 'For the Love of God (Volume 1)', 30 December.)

(iii) Go on, smile.

I have two 'medical' smiles for you today:

1.

Gwilym Williams from Bwlchgwyn [yes, there is such a place; it is a village in North Wales] thrilled his family and his neighbours when he was accepted into medical school.

While making his rounds at the hospital, a doctor pointed out an X-ray to a group of the medical students which included Gwilym.

'As you can see', the doctor said, 'the patient limps because his left tibia and fibula are radically arched'.

Then he added, 'Gwilym, what would you do in a case like this?'

Gwilym pondered for a few moments before answering, '*I suppose I'd limp too*'.

2.

Henry had been a faithful church attendee for many years. He now lay seriously ill in hospital.

His family feared that he was near death and, therefore, asked their church minister to join them at the bedside.

Sadly, as the minister stood by the bed, Henry's condition began to deteriorate. Unable to speak, he motioned frantically for something on which to write.

The minister lovingly handed him a pen and a piece of paper. Henry summoned just enough energy to scribble a short note before he died.

In the circumstances, the minister thought it best not to read the note at such a time. So, he placed the piece of paper in his jacket pocket.

At the funeral, as the minister was coming to the end of his message, he realized that he was wearing the same jacket that he had been wearing when Henry had died.

'I have only now remembered', he said, 'that dear Henry handed me a short note just before he died. I haven't looked at it before, but knowing Henry, I'm sure there is a word of inspiration there for us all'.

The minister slowly opened the note, and read, '*Please step back; you're standing on my oxygen tube!*'