

# Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

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A PLAIN TALK UPON AN ENCOURAGING TOPIC.

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## A Sermon

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C. H. SPURGEON,

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“When my soul fainted within me I remembered the LORD: and my prayer came in unto thee, into thine holy temple.”—Jonah ii. 7.

THE experience of the saints is the treasure of the Church. Every child of God who has tried and proved the promises of God, when he bears his testimony to their truth, does as it were hang up his sword and spear on the temple walls; and thus the house of the Lord becomes “like the tower of David builded for an armoury, whereon there hang a thousand bucklers, all shields of mighty men.” “The footsteps of the flock” encourage others who are following their track to the pastures above. Every preceding generation of saints has lived and suffered to enrich us with its experience. One great reason why the experience of saints in olden time is of such use to us, is this,—they were men of like passions with ourselves. Had they been otherwise, we could not have been instructed by what they suffered. They endured the same trials, and pleaded the same promises before the self-same God, who changes not in any measure or degree; so that we may safely infer that what they gained by pleading may also be obtained by us when surrounded by the same circumstances. If men were different, or if the promises were changed, or if the Lord had varied, all ancient experience would be but an idle tale to us; but now, whenever we read in Scripture of what happened to a man of faith in the day of trial, we conclude that the like will happen to us; and when we find God helping and delivering his people, we know that he will even now show himself strong on our behalf, since all the promises are yea and Amen in Christ Jesus unto the glory of God by us. The covenant has not changed, it abideth firm as the eternal hills. The preacher, therefore, feels quite safe in directing you to the experience of

Jonah, and in inviting you to make its lessons a practical guide to yourselves.

We shall use the lesson of the text, first, *for the child of God*; and, secondly, *for the sinner awakened and aroused*.

I. OUR TEXT HAS AN EVIDENT BEARING UPON THOSE WHO FEAR THE LORD, for such was Jonah. With all his mistakes, he was a man of God; and though he sought to flee from the service of his Master, yet his Master never cast him off; he brought back again his petulant messenger to his work, and honoured him in it, and he slept amongst the faithful, waiting for a glorious reward.

Think, then, of *the saints' condition*. In Jonah's case, as set forth before us, the child of God sees what a plight he may be brought into,—his soul may faint in him.

Jonah was certainly in a very terrible condition in the belly of the fish, but the position itself was probably not so dark as his own reflections, for conscience would say to him, "Alas, Jonah! you came here by your own fault, you must needs flee from the presence of God, because in your pride and self-love you refused to go to Nineveh, that great city, and deliver your Master's message." It gives a sting to misery when a man feels that he himself is alone responsible for it. If it were unavoidable that I should suffer, then I could not repine; but if I have brought all this upon myself, by my own folly, then there is a double bitterness in the gall. Jonah would reflect that now he could not help himself in any way. It would answer no purpose to be self-willed now; he was in a place where petulance and obstinacy had no liberty. If he had tried to stretch out his arm, he could not; he was immured in a dungeon which imprisoned every sense as well as every limb, and the bolts of his cell his hand could not draw; he was cast into the deep in the midst of the seas, the waters compassed him about even to the soul, the weeds were wrapped about his head. His state was helpless, and, apart from God, it was hopeless.

Children of God may be brought into a similar condition, and yet be dear to his unchanging heart. They may be poor and needy, and have no helper. No voice may speak a word of sympathy to them, and no arm may be stretched out to succour them. The best of men may be brought into the worst of positions. You must never judge of character by circumstances. Diamonds may be worried upon the wheel, and common pebbles may bathe at ease in the brook. The most wicked are permitted to clamber to the high places of the earth, while the most righteous pine at the rich man's gate, with dogs for their companions. Choice flowers full often grow amid tangled briars. Who has not heard of the lily among thorns? Where dwell the pearls? Do not the dark depths of the ocean conceal them, amid mire and wreck? Judge not by appearances, for heirs of light may walk in darkness, and princes of the celestial line may sit upon dung-hills. Men accepted of God may be brought very, very low, as Jonah was.

Let me remark that the hearts of God's servants may sometimes faint within them; yes, absolutely faint in them, and that, first, through a renewed sense of sin. In this matter, my tongue will

not outrun my experience: Some of us have enjoyed for years a full assurance of our pardon and justification. We have walked in the light as God is in the light, and we have had fellowship with the Father and with the Son, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son hath cleansed us from all sin. We have often felt our hearts dance at the assurance that "there is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Jesus Christ." We have stood at the foot of the cross, and seen the records of our sins nailed to the tree, as the token of their full discharge. Yet, at this time, we may be suffering an interval of anxious questioning, and unbelief may be lowering over us. It is possible that our faith is staggered, and, therefore, our old sins have risen up against us, and are threatening our peace. At such times, conscience will remind us of our shortcomings, which we cannot deny, and Satan will howl over the top of these shortcomings, "How can you be a child of God? If you were born from above, how could you have acted as you have done?" Then, if for a moment we look away from the cross, if we look within for marks of evidences, the horrible bog of our inward corruptions will be stirred, and there will pour into the soul such dark memories and black forebodings that we shall cry, "I am utterly lost, my hope is hypocrisy; what can I do? What shall I do?" Let me assure you that, under such exercises, it is no wonder if the soul of the Christian faints within him. Be it remembered, also, that soul-fainting is the worst form of fainting. Though Jonah in the whale's belly could not use his eyes, he did not need them; and if he could not use his arms or his feet, he did not require to do so. It mattered not if they all failed him; but for his soul to faint,—this was horror indeed! So is it with us. Our other faculties may go to sleep if they will, but when our faith swoons, and our confidence staggers, things go very hard with us. Do not, however, my brother, when in such a state, write yourself down as a hypocrite, for many of the most valiant soldiers of the cross know by personal experience what this dark sensation means.

- "What though Satan's strong temptations  
 Vex and tease thee day by day?  
 And thy sinful inclinations  
 Often fill thee with dismay?  
 Thou shalt conquer,  
 Through the Lamb's redeeming blood.
- "Though ten thousand ills beset thee,  
 From without and from within;  
 Jesus saith he'll ne'er forget thee,  
 But will save from hell and sin;  
 He is faithful  
 To perform his gracious word.
- "Though distresses now attend thee,  
 And thou tread'st the thorny road,  
 His right hand shall still defend thee,  
 Soon he'll bring thee home to God:  
 Therefore praise him,  
 Praise the great Redeemer's name."

The same faintness will come over us, at times, through the prospect of prolonged pain or severe trial. You have not yet felt the cruel smart, but you are well aware that it must come, and you shudder at the prospect. As it is true that "we feel a thousand deaths in fearing one," so do we feel a thousand trials in the dread of one single affliction. The soldier is often braver in the midst of the battle than before the conflict begins. Waiting for the assault is trying work; even the crash of the onslaught is not so great a test of endurance. I confess that I feel an inward faintness in the prospect of bodily pain; it creates a swooning sickness of heart within me to consider it for a moment; and, beloved friend, it is no strange thing that is happening to you if your soul also faints because of difficulties or adversities that lie before you. May you have wisdom to do what Jonah did—to remember the Lord,—for there and only there your great strength lieth.

Faintness will also come upon true Christians in connection with the pressure of actual sorrow. Hearts may bear up long, but they are very apt to yield if the pressure be continuous from month to month. A constant drip is felt even by a stone. A long day of drizzling rain is more wetting than a passing shower of heavy drops. A man cannot always be poor, or always be sick, or always be slandered, or always be friendless, without sometimes being tempted to say, "My heart is faint and weary; when will the day break and the shadows flee away?" I say again, the very choicest of God's elect may, through the long abiding of bitter sorrow and heavy distress, be ready to faint in the day of adversity.

The like has happened to earnest Christians engaged in diligent service, when they have seen no present success. To go on tilling a thankless soil, to continue to cast bread upon the waters, and to find no return, has caused many a true heart to faint with inward bleeding. Yet this is full often the test of our fidelity. It is a noble thing to continue preaching, like Noah, throughout a lifetime, amid ridicule, reproach, and unbelief; but it is not every man who can do so. The most of us need success to sustain our courage, and we serve our Master with most spirit when we see immediate results. Faint hearts of that kind there may be among my fellow-soldiers, ready to lay down the weapons of their warfare because they win no victory at this present; my brethren, I pray you do not desert the field of battle, but, like Jonah, remember the Lord, and abide by the royal standard still.

It may be that enquiries will be made as to why and wherefore we should thus enlarge upon the different ways in which Christians faint. Our reply is, we have been thus particular in order to meet the temptation, so common among young Christians, to fancy that they are singular in their trials. "Surely no one has felt as I feel," says many a young Christian; "I don't suppose another person ever hung down his head and his hands, and became so utterly overcome as I am." Do not listen to that suggestion, for it is devoid of truth. Faintness is very common in the Lord's hosts, and some of his mightiest men have been the victims of it. Even David himself, that hero of Judah, in the day of battle waxed

faint, and had been slain if a warrior had not come to the rescue. Do not give way to faintness; strive against it vehemently; but, at the same time, should it overcome thee, cast not away thy confidence, nor write thyself down as rejected of God or one fatally fallen.

And now, brethren, we will notice *the saints' resort*. Jonah, when he was in sore trouble, tells us, "I remembered the Lord." What is there for a faint heart to remember in the Lord? Is there not everything? There is, first, his nature. Think of that. When I am faint with sorrow, let me remember that he is very pitiful, and full of compassion; he will not strike too heavily, nor will he forget to sustain. I will, therefore, look up to him, and say, "My Father, break me not in pieces. I am a poor weather-beaten barque which can scarcely escape the hungry waves; send not thy rough wind against me, but give me a little calm that I may reach the desired haven." By remembering that the Lord's mercies are great, we shall be saved from a fainting heart.

Then I will remember his power. If I am in such a strait that I cannot help myself, *he* can help me. I have exigences and sharp pinches, but there are no such things with him. There are no emergencies and times of severe pressure with God. With him all things are possible, therefore, will I remember the Lord. If the difficulty be one which arises out of my ignorance, though I know not which way to take, I will remember his wisdom. I know that he will guide me; I will remember that he cannot mistake, and committing my way unto him my soul shall take courage. Beloved, all the attributes of God sparkle with consolation to the eye of faith. There is nothing in the Most High to discourage the man who can say, "My Father, my God, in thee do I put my trust." None who have trusted in him have ever been confounded; therefore, if thy soul sink within thee, remember the nature, and character, and attributes of God.

When you have remembered his nature, then remember his promises. What has he said concerning souls that faint? Think of these texts if you think of no other:—"I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." "Thy shoes shall be iron and brass; and as thy days, so shall thy strength be." "My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness." "Trust in the Lord, and do good: so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed." "No good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly." When we get upon this strain, and begin to talk of the promises, we need hours in which to enlarge upon the exceeding great and precious words, but we mention only these, we let fall this handful for some poor Ruth to glean. When your soul is faint, catch at a promise, believe it, and say unto the Lord, "Do as thou hast said," and your spirit shall speedily revive.

Remember, next, his covenant. What a grand word that word "covenant" is to the man who understands it! God has entered into covenant with his Son, who represents us, his people. He has said, "As I have sworn that the waters of Noah should no more go over the earth; so have I sworn that I would not be wroth

with thee, nor rebuke thee. For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed." Truly, we may say with good old David, "Although my house be not so with God; yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure." When everything else gives way, cling in the power of the Holy Spirit to covenant mercies and covenant engagements, and your spirit shall be at peace.

"With David's Lord, and ours,  
A covenant once was made,  
Whose bonds are firm and sure,  
Whose glories ne'er shall fade;  
Signed by the Sacred Three in One,  
In mutual love ere time begun.

"Firm as the lasting hills,  
This covenant shall endure,  
Whose potent *shalls* and *wills*  
Make every blessing sure:  
When ruin shakes all nature's frame,  
Its jots and tittles stand the same."

Again, when we remember the Lord, we should remember what he has been to us in past times. When any of us fall to doubting and fearing, we are indeed blameworthy, for the Lord has never given us any occasion for doubting him. He has helped us in sorer troubles than we are passing through at this time. We have tested his faithfulness, his power, and his goodness at a heavier rate than now, and though hardly tried, they have never failed us yet; they have borne the strain of many years, and show no signs of giving way; wherefore, then, are we distrustful? Many saints have proved the Lord's faithfulness for fifty, sixty, or even seventy years; how can they be of doubtful mind after this? What! has your God been true for seventy years, and cannot you trust him a few more days? Has he brought you to seventy-five, and cannot you trust him the few months more that you are to remain in the wilderness? Call to remembrance the days of old, the love of his heart, and the might of his arm, when he came to your rescue, and took you out of the deep waters, and set your feet upon a rock, and established your goings. He is the same God still; therefore, when your soul fainteth within you, remember the Lord, and you will be comforted.

Thus I have shown you the saint's plight and the saint's resort; now observe *the success of his prayer*. Jonah was so comforted with the thoughts of God that he began to pray, and his prayer was not drowned in the water, nor choked in the fish's belly, neither was it held captive by the weeds that were about his head, but up it went like an electric flash, through waves, through clouds, beyond the stars, up to the throne of God, and down came the answer like a return message. Nothing can destroy or detain a real prayer; its flight to the throne is swift and certain. God the Holy Ghost writes our prayers, God the Son presents our prayers,

and God the Father accepts our prayers, and with the whole Trinity to help us in it, what cannot prayer perform? I may be speaking to some who are under very severe trials,—I feel persuaded that I am,—let me beg them to take this promise to themselves as their own; and I pray God the Holy Ghost to lay it home to their hearts, and make it theirs, “I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.” God will not fail you though you fail yourself. Though you faint, he fainteth not, neither is weary. Lift up your cry, and he will lift up his hand. Go to your knees, you are strongest there; resort to your chamber, and it shall be to you none other than the gate of heaven. Tell your God your grief; heavy to you, it will be light enough to him. Dilemmas will all be plain to his wisdom, and difficulties will vanish before his strength. Oh, tell it not in Gath that Israel cannot trust in God; publish it not in the streets of Askelon that trouble can dismay those who lean upon the eternal arm. With Jehovah in the van, O hosts of Israel, dare ye fear? “The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge.” What man’s heart shall quail, or what soul shall faint? “Lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees.” Say unto the feeble in heart, “Be strong; fear not. God is with you; he will help you, and that right early.”

II. Now we must change the subject altogether. Having addressed the people of God, we feel very anxious to speak to those concerning whom the Lord has designs of love, but who are not yet made manifest. THE SINNER, WHEN GOD COMES TO DEAL WITH HIM, IS BROUGHT INTO THE SAME PLIGHT AS JONAH. His soul faints in him. What does that show?

It shows very much which we are glad to see. When a man’s soul faints within him, it is clear that *his carelessness is gone*. He used to take things very easily, and as long as he could make merry from day to day, what cared he about heaven or hell? The preacher’s warnings were to him so much rant, and his earnestness fanaticism; but now the man feels an arrow sticking in his own loins, and he knows that there is a reality in sin, it is to him in very deed an evil and a bitter thing. Now the cup of gall is put to his own lips, and he feels the poison in his own veins. His heart faints within him, and he remains careless no longer; which is no small gain in the preacher’s estimation.

His faintness also shows that *he will be self-righteous no longer*. Once he hoped he was as good as other people, and perhaps a little better; and for all that he could see, he was every whit as excellent as the saints themselves. They might speak about their trusting in Jesus Christ, but he was working for himself, and expected by his regular habits to win as good a place in the world to come as the best of believers. Ah! but now God has dealt with him, and let the daylight into his soul, and he sees that his gold and silver are cankered, and that his fair linen is filthy and worm-eaten; he discovers that his righteousnesses are as filthy rags, and that he must have something better than the works of the law to trust in, or he must perish. So far so good. Things are hopeful when there is no more self-reliance left in the sinner. The worst

of human nature is that, though it cannot lift a finger for its own salvation, it thinks it can do it all; and though its only place is the place of death, and it is a mercy when it comes to burial, yet that same human nature is so proud that it would, if it could, be its own redeemer. When God make man's conscience a target for his fiery arrows, then straightway he feels that his life is no longer in him, and that he can do nothing, and he cries out, "God be merciful to me." Oh, that the two-edged sword of the gospel would slay all our spiritual self-reliance, and lay us in the dust at the feet of the crucified Saviour.

Perhaps I speak to some who faint because, though they have given up all self-righteousness now, and relinquished all self-dependence, they yet *have not laid hold upon Christ and his salvation*. "I have been trying to believe," says one, "but I cannot succeed." Well do I remember the time when I laboured to believe. It is a strange way of putting it, yet so it was. When I wished to believe, and longed to trust, I found I could not. It seemed to me that the way to heaven by Christ's righteousness was as difficult as the way to heaven by my own, and that I could as soon get to heaven by Sinai as by Calvary. I could do nothing, I could neither repent nor believe. I fainted with despair, feeling as if I must be lost despite the gospel, and for ever driven from Jehovah's presence, even though Christ had died. Ah! I am not sorry if you also have come to this condition. The way to the door of faith is through the gate of self-despair. Till thou hast seen thy last hope destroyed, thou wilt never look to Christ for all things, and yet thou wilt never be saved until thou dost; for God has laid no help on you, he has laid help upon One that is mighty, even Jesus only, who is the sole Saviour of sinners. Here, then, we have before us the sinner's plight; and I will venture to call it, though it is a very wretched one, a very blessed one; and I heartily wish that every unconverted man were brought into such a condition that his soul fainted within him.

Now, hear ye the gospel, incline your ear to it, and ye shall live. The way of salvation to you is the way which Jonah took. When his soul fainted, he remembered the Lord. I beseech you, by the living God, now to remember the Lord; and if you ask me what it is you should remember, I will tell you in a few words. Remember the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Saviour of sinners; remember him who suffered in the room of the guilty. Know, assuredly, that God has visited upon him the transgressions of his people. Now, the sufferings of such an one as Jesus must have power to cleanse away sins. He is God, and if he deigns to die, there must be such merit in his death that he is able to save to the uttermost all them that come unto God by him. You are bidden, at this moment, in God's name, to trust your soul in those hands that were nailed to the cross, and rest your life with him who poured out his soul unto death that you might live. In yourself, you may well despair; but remembering his name, coupled with the names of Gethsemane and Golgotha, remembering all his pains, and griefs, and woes unutterable,—remembering these by

faith, there shall be salvation for you at this moment. Do I hear you sigh, "Oh! but I have nothing good within me"? Know, then, that all good is in him for thee; and go to him for it. "But I am unworthy." He is worthy; go to him for worthiness. "But I do not feel as I should." He felt as he should; go to him for all that thou shouldst feel. If thou bringest a rusty farthing of thine own, God will not have it; it would only insult the precious gold of Ophir, which Jesus freely gives thee, if he should allow thy cankered counterfeits to be mixed therewith. Away with thy filthy rags! Wouldst thou add them to the spotless garment which Christ has woven? Dross and dung, the apostle says our best works are, if we venture to put them side by side with the merits of our Redeemer. None but Jesus can save; remember him, and live!

"But," says one, "I have tried to remember the Lord; but I find that, while I can trust him to pardon my sins, yet I have such a hard heart, and so many temptations, and I am so weak for all that is good, that I still despair." Hearken, then, yet again: remember the Lord. At this time remember the Holy Ghost. When Jesus ascended on high, the Holy Ghost was given, and he has never been recalled. The Holy Ghost is here in this assembly now, and in the Holy Ghost is your hope against indwelling sin. You complain that you cannot pray, but the Spirit helpeth our infirmities. You mourn that you cannot believe, but faith is the gift of God and the work of the Holy Spirit. A tender heart, a penitential frame of mind, a right spirit,—these are the work of the Holy Ghost in you. You can do nothing, but the Holy Ghost can work everything in you. Give yourself up to those dear hands that were pierced, and the power of the Holy Spirit shall come upon you. A new heart will he give you, and a right spirit will he put within you; you shall learn his statutes, and walk in his ways. Everything is provided for the believer that he can possibly want. O young man, anxious to be saved, the salvation of Jesus Christ precisely suits your case! O seeking soul, whatever it is thou cravest to make thee fit to dwell where God is for ever, it is all to be had, and to be had for the asking, for it is all provided in the covenant of grace; and if thou wilt remember Jesus the Lord, and the Holy Ghost,—the Indweller who renews the mind,—thou wilt be cheered and comforted!

Yet let me not forget another Person of the sacred Majesty of heaven,—remember the Father as well as the Son and the Spirit; and let me help thee to remember him. Thou, trembling sinner, must not think of God as severe or stern, for he is love. Wouldst thou be glad to be saved? He will be gladder still to save thee. Dost thou wish to return to thy God to-night? Thy God already meets thee, and bids thee come. Wouldst thou be pardoned? The absolution is on his lips. Wouldst thou be cleansed? The fountain of atoning blood was filled by his mercy, and filled for all who believe in his Son. Come and welcome, come and welcome! The child is glad to be forgiven, but the Father is gladder still to forgive. Jehovah's melting bowels yearn to clasp his Ephraim to

his breast. Seek him at once, poor souls, and ye shall not find him hard and cold, but waiting to be gracious, ready to forgive, a God delighting in mercy. If you can thus remember God, the Son, the Spirit, and the Father, though your soul faint within you, you may be encouraged.

And so I close by bidding you, if such be the case, to imitate Jonah's example, and send up a prayer to heaven, for it will come up even to God's holy temple. Jonah had no prayer-book, and you need none. God the Holy Ghost can put more living prayer into half-a-dozen words of your own than you could get out of a ton weight of paper prayers. Jonah's prayer was not notable for its words. The fish's belly was not the place for picked phrases, nor for long-winded orations. We do not believe that he offered a long prayer either, but it came right up from his heart, and flew straight up to heaven. It was shot by the strong bow of intense desire and agony of soul, and, therefore, it speeded its way to the throne of the Most High. If you would now pray, never mind your words, it is the soul of prayer that God accepts. If you would be saved, go to your chamber, and rise not from your knees till the Lord has heard you. Ay, where you now are, let your souls pour out themselves before God, and faith in Jesus will give you immediate salvation.

### Exposition by C. H. Spurgeon.

#### JONAH II

Verse 1. *Then Jonah prayed unto the LORD his God out of the fish's belly.*

What a strange place for prayer! Surely this is the only prayer that ever went up to God out of a fish's belly. Jonah found himself alive;—that was the surprising thing, that he was alive in the belly of a fish;—and because he was alive, he began to pray. It is such a wonder that some people here should continue to live that they ought to begin to pray. If you live with death so near, and in so great peril, and yet you do not pray, what is to become of you?

This prayer of Jonah is very remarkable because it is not a prayer at all, in the sense in which we usually apply the word to petition and supplication. If you read the prayer through, you will see that it is almost all thanksgiving; and the best prayer in all the world is a prayer that is full of thankfulness. We praise the Lord for what he has done for us, and thus we do, in effect, ask him to perfect the work which he has begun. He has delivered us; so we bless his holy name, and by implication we beseech him still to deliver us.

Notice that it says here, "*Then Jonah prayed unto the Lord his God.*"

He was a runaway; he had tried to escape from the presence of God; yet the Lord was still his God. God will not lose any of his people; even if, like Jonah, they are in the belly of a fish, Jehovah is still their God: "*Then Jonah prayed unto the Lord his God out of the fish's belly.*"—

2. *And said, I cried by reason of mine affliction unto the LORD, and he heard me;—*

You see that this is not praying, it is telling the Lord what he had done for his disobedient servant. Jonah had prayed, and the Lord had heard him, yet he was still in the fish's belly. Unbelief would have said, "You have lived so long, Jonah; but you cannot expect to live to get out of this dreary, damp, fetid prison." Ah, but faith is out of prison even while she