

GRACE GAZETTE

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Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees; And make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed.

Hebrews 12:12-13

THE EDUCATION OF JONAH

Now the word of the LORD came unto Jonah. Jonah 1:1

Usually, when we hear the account of Jonah preached upon it is presented as a morality play on the danger of disobeying GOD with its resulting consequences, or either as evidence that the LORD is hoping that some will repent upon hearing the preaching of the word of GOD and therefore giving men a chance to be saved by taking heed thereto. There is no doubt that there are dire consequences to those who disobey the commandments of GOD. (see Rev.21:8) We are also certain that the people of GOD shall be brought to repentance according to GOD's purpose and in HIS own time. (see II Pet.3:9)

While we recognize the application of various principles and exhortations which can be given to the people of GOD by the illustration of Jonah's experience we see the account, found in the book of Jonah, to be primarily about the LORD's purpose in teaching Jonah a few needful lessons, not the least of which is that HE will show mercy to whom HE will show mercy, salvation is of the LORD, and that GOD will cause all things to work together for good to them who are the called according to HIS purpose. Yet the greatest teaching which the LORD brought to Jonah was to acquaint Jonah with his own hardness of heart.

It often pleases the LORD to send HIS word unto HIS people, even as HE did to Jonah. While it is true that the LORD called Jonah to "preach" to the inhabitants of Nineveh; the main work of the SPIRIT in bringing the word of the LORD to Jonah was to teach Jonah about Jonah. To this end, "the word of the LORD came unto Jonah." Many "preachers" labor under the notion that they are primarily sent to declare the gospel to others and spend much time and effort in sermon preparation and bible study to that very end as though by their eloquence and execution they shall be useful tools in the LORD's hand. This is the mindset of those that would conduct classes on how to "win souls".

The truth is that the LORD is able to raise up stones to praise HIM and can speak through an ass as easily as through a man's tongue. GOD does indeed condescend to allow men to speak of heavenly things as the SPIRIT gives them utterance but it is folly for men to become enamored with their own (supposed) importance in this matter.

The LORD seldom sends the "word of the LORD" to any man (or woman for that matter) primarily for the purpose of taking it to someone else. HIS primary work in all of HIS children is to conform them to the image of CHRIST. "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them." (Eph 2:10) "For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren." (Rom 8:29) The man who is not acquainted with his own depravity, hardness of heart, and total unworthiness to be a son of GOD, let alone a herald of truth, yea of his own inability to perform it at all, is not taught of

the SPIRIT regardless of his eloquence and ability to appeal to the reason of men or his supposed "success" in the application of what he supposedly "knows". *"Knowledge puffeth up, but charity edifieth. And if any man think that he knoweth any thing, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know."* (1Cor 8:1-2)

The LORD will plow HIS fields deeply before the time of sowing. HE does prepare all things necessary for the application of the word in the heart of those whom HE loves, whether that person is the preacher or the hearer. The LORD prepared the city of Nineveh for Jonah's benefit even as HE prepared, a fish, a gourd, a worm, and a wind for the same purpose. (see Jonah 1:17, 4:6-8) The LORD's love for Jonah is revealed in the application of HIS truth to Jonah's heart, even using HIS display of mercy to that city for Jonah's benefit.

The LORD is able to quickly apply the truth to those whom HE loves but HE may take HIS time in breaking up their fallow ground in preparation for its planting. We can see this in HIS dealings with Peter. Peter boasted of his willingness to follow the LORD even unto death. The LORD's chastening of Peter began with the inquiries of a young maid, and then quickly (in the blink of an eye), HE applied HIS truth to Peter's heart as the cock crew. HE did the same with David as HE marked out the steps which David took to the rooftop where he gazed upon Bathsheba. After many days, HE brought the prophet before David with an account of such injustice and inhumanity, that David was moved with "righteous indignation" But oh how suddenly did the truth of GOD smite David's heart when Nathan declared "thou art the man." The LORD will bring HIS people to repentance and there is no remedy for it, HE will accomplish HIS purpose. If we be without chastisement then are we bastards and not sons. *"For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death."* (2Cor 7:10)

It is impossible that any of those who are the objects of HIS love should ever escape being taught by the application of HIS word to them at HIS appointed time. Even as we read in Hebrews, *"It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."* (Heb 10:31) The world may go on its way to its sure destruction but GOD will faithfully lead those that are HIS into "all truth". Some have assumed that this means that they will all become "doctrinaires", and then they go about to state the various points of "theological understanding" which men must have to be true believers, many times making that standard to be equated with their own obscure understandings and interpretations.

Yet that "truth" which the LORD is pleased to burn into the hearts of HIS own is most often a much more uncomfortable revelation than a few doctrinal shibboleths with which men would like to define true orthodoxy. The LORD will acquaint HIS people with a thorough understanding of their own depravity as they are made to exclaim with Job, *"I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes."* (Job 42:6) HE will give them the same lament and work in them the same hope as the apostle Paul as he said, *"O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin."* (Rom 7:24-25)

HE will bring to their mind the preciousness of the LORD's work in the earth and teach them to love those whom the LORD calls in it. *"By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another."* (John 13:35) *"We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death."* (1John 3:14) *"Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves."* (Phil 2:3) These are much more difficult lessons to learn than that kind of knowledge which puffs up, yet the working in and out of these things is that whereby the LORD is pleased to manifest HIMSELF in HIS people.

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