



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

6420 Churchill Way | Dallas, Texas | 75230 | t 972.239.5371 | believerschapeldallas.org

The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Jonah 1: 4-16

“Man Overboard: the Doctrine of Christian Declension”

TRANSCRIPT

The scripture reading for today is in the Book of Jonah. This is the second in our series in this book. And we’re going to read beginning the first verse through the sixteenth verse. And then I want to read one verse in the Gospel of Matthew. Jonah chapter 1 verse 1:

“Now the word of the LORD came unto Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before me. But Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the LORD, and went down to Joppa; and he found a ship going to Tarshish: so he paid the fare thereof, and went down into it, to go with them unto Tarshish from the presence of the LORD. 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. Then the mariners were afraid, and cried every man unto his god, and cast forth the wares that were in the ship into the sea, to lighten it of them. But Jonah was gone down into the sides of the ship; and he lay, and was fast asleep. So the shipmaster came to him, and said unto him, What meanest thou, O sleeper? arise, call upon thy God, if so be that God will think upon us, that we perish not. And they said every one to his fellow, Come, and let us cast lots, that we may know for

whose cause this evil is upon us. So they cast lots, and the lot fell upon Jonah. Then said they unto him, Tell us, we pray thee, for whose cause this evil is upon us; What is thine occupation? and where comest thou? What is thy country? And of what people art thou? And he said unto them, I am an Hebrew; and I fear the LORD, the God of heaven, which hath made the sea and the dry land. Then were the men exceedingly afraid, and said unto him. Why hast thou done this? For the men knew that he fled from the presence of the LORD, because he had told them. Then said they unto him, What shall we do unto thee, that the sea may be calm unto us? For the sea wrought, and was tempestuous. (The Hebrew text is very vivid here. It really means “is growing more and more stormy;” or as we might say today, “growing stormier and stormier.”) And he said unto them, Take me up, and cast me forth into the sea; so shall the sea be calm unto you: for I know that for my sake this great tempest is upon you. Nevertheless the men rowed hard to bring it to the land; but they could not: for the sea wrought, and was tempestuous against them (it was growing stormier all the time). Wherefore they cried unto the LORD, and said, We beseech thee, O LORD, we beseech thee, let us not perish for this man's life, and lay not upon us innocent blood: for thou, O LORD, hast done as it pleased thee. So they took up Jonah, and cast him forth into the sea: and the sea ceased from its raging. Then the men feared the LORD exceedingly, and offered a sacrifice unto the LORD, and made vows.” I’m not going to read verse 17; that really belongs to our next study. It so happens that in the Hebrew text that’s the next verse of the first chapter, anyway.

But let’s turn over and read one verse in the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 12 and verse 40. For here our Lord refers to Jonah. You’ll remember last week in the introduction to the message I pointed out that Jonah is the only one of the Minor Prophets that is referred to by the Lord Jesus. And this is the text in which he refers to him. In the fortieth verse of the twelfth chapter of the Gospel of Matthew we read,

“Man Overboard: The Doctrine of Christian Declension” by S. Lewis Johnson
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“For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish; so shall the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.”

May God bless this reading from his word. Let’s bow together in a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father we thank Thee for the privilege of the ministry of the word of God. We thank Thee through the scriptures that we can come to know Thee, and through the provision Thou hast for us, through the saving ministry of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We thank Thee that he is the Messiah of Israel and the Savior of the world. And we rejoice Lord in the fact that Thou hast laid Thy hand upon us and brought us near to Thee. And we thank Thee that we are able to approach Thee through the great priest that we have at the right hand at the throne of God. And we come to Thee through him, knowing that we have an access, and we ask Thee, O God, that through the word Thou wilt minister to us in this meeting.

For those, Lord, who may have come here and do not know Thee, we pray through the preaching of the word they may come to know him who to know is life eternal. And for those who do, Lord, we pray this may be a time in which we are built up and strengthened in the faith. And for Christians who may have come out of fellowship with Thee, O God, we pray that Thou wilt minister to them and bring them back into fellowship with Thee through confession of sin and the restoring work of our great God.

We would also, Lord, particularly remember any who are ill, and those who are sick, and those who are troubled and disturbed, and those whose lives do not evidence the presence of Thy hand upon them and in them. Wilt Thou console and comfort them and encourage them, and minister to them as the need exists.

We thank Thee for this land in which we are found. And we pray for our President and for those who are associated with him. Give them guidance in these difficult days. And Lord, we remember our soldiers. Not only in Vietnam but wherever

they may be. Wilt Thou especially, O God, bring the word of God to them. May through these experiences their own hearts reflect upon their need of a right relationship with Thee. And may they, as the Holy Spirit works, be brought to know him whom to know is life eternal. And we commit them to Thee.

We commit those who are preaching the word of God to Thee. Those in Dallas. Those in this country and throughout the world. We thank Thee that the gospel of Jesus Christ is suitable for all men wherever they may be. And so wilt Thou in Thy sovereign grace and mercy call out Thine elect to the glory of Thy name.

And this we ask Thee through Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior. Amen.

[Message] Last Sunday morning as we began our series in the Book of Jonah, the subject was the doctrine of Satanic providence. And I tried, as we studied the first few verses of the first chapter to stress the fact that Christian guidance is not guidance by circumstances, but first of all by the principles of the word of God, and then secondly by the testimony of the Holy Spirit, and then God is loud enough to make a willing heart hear, and thirdly by the peace of Jesus Christ which is given as a confirmation of the will of God in our lives.

And you can see this illustrated all through the Bible. You can see it illustrated, for example, in the Apostle Paul’s life. In one of his missionary journeys he traveled through Asia Minor. He attempted to go west into the province of Asia, and the Spirit suffered him not. That was the testimony of the Holy Spirit. And then he attempted to go north, and went north, and finally went into Bithynia, but he was forbidden by the Holy Spirit. And again, the testimony of the Holy Spirit to him gave him his divine guidance. And finally he was forced down to the city of Troas, and there he received the vision of the man from Macedonia which was also a testimony of the Holy Spirit to him. And as he reflected upon his past, he gathered that God had called him to pass over the Aegean Sea to Philippi and to Europe, probably the most significant journey for the Western world in

past history. For it is through that one journey that the gospel came to the Western world and has made such tremendous impact through the centuries ever since.

The Apostle was guided by the testimony of the Holy Spirit, the principles of the word of God, and as he responded he had the peace of Jesus Christ in his heart. Not only does God arrange circumstances, but Satan arranges circumstances we discovered, and guidance can never be by circumstances. Circumstances are neither right nor wrong, propitious or unpropitious in themselves so far as divine guidance is concerned.

Now I’ve said this because I think that Christians need to remember that guidance is not by circumstances. So many of them drift along, dependent upon the way circumstances arrange themselves before them, thinking that is divine guidance. Our responsibility is to maintain a very close relationship to the Lord, and this is provided to us through Jesus Christ and through the presence of the Holy Spirit, and we should not neglect that personal relationship for any understanding of the meaning of our circumstances, for they are very deceptive.

Circumstances might have told Israel that they should not take Jericho, but it was God’s will that they do that. And on the other hand, Jonah, when he arrived at Joppa, and he had the money in his pocket, and the ship was going west, might well have reasoned circumstances have decreed that I should go to Tarshish when God had already spoken plainly to him and had told him that he should go to Nineveh. So, I want to stress this because I think this is extremely important for us today.

It was rather interesting that this week I sat down with a family, and they had heard me make this statement, and one of them went into the back of the house and brought out a piece of paper and on the piece of paper from a missionary society was an article which was entitled, “Guidance by Circumstances.” So, I’m stressing it again, because it’s important.

Now today we want to look at the next section of Book of Jonah and really conclude chapter one today with this second study. And our topic is “Man Overboard: the Doctrine of Christian Declension.”

One of our greatest Christian authors, Charles Reade, known for his book, *The Cloister and the Hearth*, has called Jonah, “The most beautiful story ever written in so small a compass.” Mr. Reade went on to say, “It contains forty-eight verses and 1,328 words. One does not get far in an English novel of 1,328 words. There is growth of character, a distinct plot worked out without haste or crudity. Only a great artist could have hit on a perfect proportion of dialogue and narrative.”

We are not surprised, Mr. Reade. Because you see, the author of the Book of Jonah is not Jonah, ultimately, but the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit has so guided Jonah that there is a perfect proportion between dialogue and narrative, but we are thankful for this testimony from a master of English prose.

One of the greatest tributes, I think, to the Book of Jonah was written by a man who is best known among Old Testament scholars for his criticism of the Old Testament. Professor Coroneil has said, “I have read the Book of Jonah more than 100 times (that’s more than many Christians can say; in fact, to tell you the truth, it is ninety-nine more times than most Christians can say) and I publicly avow,” he says, “that I cannot now take up this marvelous book, name or ever speak of it without a tear rising to my eyes.” I don’t think I’ve ever seen a Christian read the Book of Jonah and a tear stream down his faith. “This apparently trivial book is one of the deepest and grandest ever written, and I should like to say to everyone who approaches it, take off thy shoes, for the place upon which thou standest is holy ground.”

In our last study, Jonah, disobedient, refuses the Nineveh assignment because he loved his country more than he loved his God. Will you permit me, without being offended at me, to repeat this? He refused his Nineveh assignment because he loved his country more than he loved his God. Now, I love my country. I would hope if my

country were right before God, and I were called upon to give my life for my country, I should be willing to do it. I am thankful for the men who are fighting for me in Vietnam. I have the greatest of respect for them, and I want to remember them in my prayers. And I am in sympathy, so far as I can tell, with all that they are doing.

But you know, there is a loyalty that is higher than a loyalty to Washington for a Christian, and that is loyalty to God. And if the two should ever conflict, then my loyalty is to God. Now Jonah loved his country more than he loved his God. And as a result, he flees disobedient. Like the Prodigal, he took his journey into a far country. And once you disobey the Lord, the way down becomes very easy.

Virgil has said, *facilis descensus Averni* – “Easy is the descent to Hades.” Now of course, we might disagree with his theology, but we surely would all agree if we are believers that it is very easy to sink low when we depart from the will of God.

So, this morning we are going to talk about the doctrine of Christian declension or the doctrine of Christian crawl-fishing [pause, followed by laughter]. I am tempted to use an outline that a student at the seminary suggested to me this week over at the bookroom. He said, “He had heard an outline of the Book of Jonah which was designed to represent the three chief points of the first chapter. One, that Jonah disobeyed God. And second, that he went down into that ship and fell asleep. And third, that finally he was thrown out into the Mediterranean Sea. And the three points were: first point, Jonah chickens out [laughter]; second point, Jonah sacks out [more laughter]; third point, Jonah bails out [laughter]. Now I think that outline communicates very well, but I’m going to use amore sedate one which is probably more suitable to me.

But what I would like to do this morning in the time that we have for the study of the remainder of this first chapter, is I would like to interpret the experience that Jonah has had by tracing the story through to its conclusion with Jonah in the water and the mariners calling upon Jehovah, the God of Israel. And then I’d like to go back and draw two or three generalizations which illustrate principles that are important for us today.

And then finally, I’d like for us to say a word about the typology, or in case that offends you, about the example that Jonah is of our Lord Jesus Christ.

So let’s now think of Jonah as he has left his home city, has made his way to Joppa, is now on the boat on the way to Spain. He has been doped or duped by the devil, and now he’s going to learn the important truth: woe unto him that striveth with his maker.

Jonah will learn this in a most unusual way. We read last time in the third verse that after God had given Jonah his message, but Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish. And we commented on the significance of that little word, *but*, which expresses the disobedience of the prophet to his God.

But there is another *but* that begins the fourth verse. God has a *but* that negates and rules out Jonah’s *but*. *But* the Lord sent out a great wind into the sea. Now let me say a few words, then, about the tempest and the terror. The Lord sent out a great wind into the sea, and there was a mighty tempest in the sea, so that the ship was in danger of being broken. That word in the Hebrew text, “in danger of being” is an expression that really means something like, “thought it would be broken.” It’s the word that frequently is rendered “to think” or “to reckon.” And so what Jonah really writes is something like this, that, “so that the ship thought it would be broken.” And the picture you get, though I’m sure the ship did not think, but the picture you get is of a ship that is doing, it seems, more thinking than the prophet himself, which is not unusual, of course. Balaam’s ass was a much better spiritual thinker than Balaam himself [laughter].

And sometimes, the same thing is true of prophets today. It’s entirely possible for the most stupid individual to know more than the preacher who is out of the will of God. And often, everyone knows it but he.

Now when the storm came, Jonah is fast asleep in the sides of the boat. He was not seasick, as some have suggested. He had not taken a sleeping pill – sleeping pills were not known then; if they were known, I’m sure that he would have gobbled up a few

that night. But Jonah was sleeping the sleep of despair and defeat. He was asleep because he was disobedient. And often when we are disobedient to the will of God, we do not want to think about God. We do not want to think about his word. We do not want to think about our responsibilities.

And I’ll just tell you a little secret. When I get out of the will of God, it’s very wonderful to take a nap, because I don’t have to think for a while. Before I was a Christian, I drowned my sorrows in different ways. Now I do it by sleeping. Have you ever felt that way? That’s what’s happening to Jonah. It’s the sleep of defeat. It’s the sleep of despair. It’s the sleep of the conviction of sin. And so he’s fast asleep. But what a beautiful picture he is of Christians out of fellowship with God. Running away from God and asleep.

Now I know that Believers Chapel is composed of some very vital people. I think if I had to evaluate this congregation, I’d say that God’s hand has been upon us and that we have seen his blessing upon us, and there has been a vitality and a genuineness that has been fruitful before God. But nevertheless, I have a conviction that some of us are asleep. I really do feel, and perhaps it is I, as much as you, but I really do feel that often, we give the impression of being asleep. Now perhaps you’re sitting in the audience at this point and you’re saying, “Now Dr. Johnson, we’re not asleep. We talk about the Lord all the time.”

Have you ever noticed this characteristic of sleepers? They talk in their sleep.

“But Dr. Johnson, we have a consistent Christian walk.” Have you ever noticed this about sleepers? They walk in their sleep. “But Dr. Johnson, when the gospel is proclaimed to us and the cross of Christ is lifted up, and we hear of the love of the one who loved us and gave himself for us, why, often we shed a tear or two.” Have you ever noticed this about people who sleep? They can weep in their sleep. “Well Dr. Johnson, we rejoice; we praise the Lord.” Have you ever noticed this about sleepers? They can laugh in their sleep. It’s rather eerie, but haven’t you heard someone like that, just

chuckling away? You shake’em [Johnson gestures]; why they’ve been asleep all the time [laughter]. It’s amazing the things you can do in your sleep, and it’s amazing the things that Christians do in their sleep.

Now of course, I know my words are not getting through to many of you, because you’re asleep [laughter], but for those of you who are awake right now, I want to say to you, O may God keep us from falling asleep as a church. Here is Jonah, the prophet of God, the man who has the answers. The sailors call upon their gods and nothing happens. But the God of Jehovah is the true God; the one man whose prayer might bring them peace is asleep. And I would long for the day when we would realize that heaven was not just a tale, and that hell was not a fiction, but a reality, and if we just realize that we have been called of God to be ambassadors of Jesus Christ and would wake up and do something about it.

I’m not talking about getting more people into the Sunday morning service. It’s quite obvious we couldn’t handle’em. I’m speaking about the personal lives of each one of us. You know, the Christian church has so many things backwards. I mentioned in my opening remarks – I hope I didn’t offend you – we don’t take up a collection because we feel that God’s work should be supported by God’s people. Everyone should be reminded that putting money into the collection place does not advance you one step toward God, and we don’t want to give you the opportunity to think that.

But you know, most people have the wrong idea of what the church service is about anyway. The idea of a church is not for everyone to get busy and bring in a few people on Sunday morning and hear the word and be evangelized. But you see, the church meeting is supposed to be time when the church members are built up and strengthened so that they may go forth for the remainder of the week -- this is the first day, you know – and do the work of God individually. Each one of you, individually, is an ambassador of Jesus Christ. You are to do the work of ministry. I or anyone else who teaches the word is merely to build you up in the faith so that you may more strongly do

the work that God has called you individually. That is the ministry. That is the ministry for which you have been called. Our churches and our church is full of sleeping people like Jonah, the sleeping prophet.

Our Lord slept in a boat too, you know, but his sleep was so different from the sleep of Jonah. Jonah, of course, was sleeping as a man whose conscience was under conviction. Jesus was sleeping because of a conscience that was a peace with God and because of a body that was also tired from a day of activity.

Now the shipmaster, being a man who had certain theological convictions – everyone does, you know – he had certain theological convictions and his theological convictions was simply this: that the things that happen on earth are usually due to the thoughts and opinions and activities of the gods in heaven. And so all of the men called upon their god, but he also remembered that they also had a passenger who probably had a god, and so he came down to Jonah in the midst of the sides of the ship, into his little state room, and he called out to him, “What meanest thou O sleeper? Arise, call upon thy god! If so be that god will think upon us and we perish not.” And so the heather ship owner or shipmaster encourages the Hebrew prophet to pray.

Now, at this point, they engage in a little of, what I like to call a little Phoenician roulette. I don’t know how they drew lots. They may have spun a bottle. They may have put lots in a bag, and they may have drawn out the lot that was Jonah’s lot. But at any rate, the cat was out of the bag, the jig was up, and Jonah discovered that he must confess. It is possible that he remembered a little text of the Old Testament that said, “Be sure for your sin will find out.” Because it surely will. You cannot get out of fellowship with God and forget God, because he will not be forgotten.

You know, I am so glad we have a God who does not forget us. And even when we disobey, even when we get down to Joppa and we take passage in ship that is for the west, as far away as we can, thousands of miles away, God does not forget us. And we may persist in our disobedience, but he does not forget, because he is the kind of Father

who loves and he loves to the nth degree of divine love -- and he doesn’t forget. You can never the care of God if you belong to him.

Now he doesn’t spank other people’s children, but he does discipline his own, and so Jonah is the object of God’s care in the storm and now in the lots that are cast, and he discovers that God has been speaking. And he has finally brought the prophet to this place, and it’s a good thing to be brought to this place.

Just in passing, you’ll notice that guidance was by lot, and it’s somewhat striking to read in the Old Testament that the Israelites were occasionally guided by the casting of lots. The last mention of it is in the New Testament [Acts] in the first chapter when lots were cast for the successor to Judas. We do not need lots today; the Holy Spirit has come. But lots were used.

Some people, however, do not realize that they have the Holy Spirit of God indwelling them if they’ve believed in Jesus Christ. And they do not rely upon him. I’ve known many a Christian who finds his guidance by turning to a page in the Bible at random. Not so long ago, again, someone came up to me and said, “I was reading such-and-such a passage and God spoke to me out of this clause,” and the clause had nothing to do whatsoever with what they were doing.

Now I think God does accommodate us, accommodate himself to us in many ways, and if we were so childish that’s the only way in which we receive guidance from God, he’ll accommodate us. We’re like little infants playing around on the floor, opening the Bible at places, looking for guidance at some clause or phrase that sounds sweet to us, or that may have something in it which reminds us of some problem with which we have been wrestling.

I heard of a man who was addicted to this, and everyday he would open his Bible and put a finger on a spot, and that was his guidance for the day. And so this morning he opened it up, and he put his finger on a place, and it was a text in Matthew chapter 27 and verse 5 which spoke about Judas hanging himself. [Laughter] And he was not quite

sure how that fit into guidance for they day, and so he closed his Bible and he opened it up again, and he put his finger on another spot and it was Luke chapter 10 and verse 37 which said, “Go and do thou likewise.” [Laughter] And so that disturbed him even more. And he closed his Bible and opened it up a third time and the finger came right down on John chapter 13 and verse 27 which says, “That thou doest, do quickly.” [More laughter]

I imagine that’s a story. But the truth is that sooner or later you’re going to find that kind of thing by looking for guidance in that sort of way. So don’t look for guidance that way. Guidance comes by the principles of the word of God as they are seen in the context. The Bible is not some magic book that you open up for specific guidance here and there, looking for some specific phrase or clause that you think is applicable to you.

Well, the gig was up, and Jonah must now confess. “So said they unto him, for whose cause this evil is upon us; What is thine occupation?” Prophet. “From whence comest thou?” Israel, the land of Jehovah. “What is thy country?” Well, my country is the country composed of people whom God brought out from the land of Egypt. “Of what people art thou?” The people of Israel; the people who have been elected by God through Abraham, Isaac, Jacob to serve as a minister to the nations.” Jonah said, “I’m an Hebrew. I fear the LORD.” Now he means by that, not that I fear God. I fear the LORD, I fear Jehovah, I fear the great covenant-keeping God, our special God, our unique God, the God of heaven who hath made the sea.

Ah. Made the sea? And I think with this, the shipmaster and the others paled a little bit. He has made the sea and the dry land. Then the men were exceedingly afraid, and they said, “What is this that thou hast done?” The same words by the way that are said in the Hebrew text of God to Eve in the garden, “What is this that thou hast done?” What is this that thou hast done? Why hast thou done this, it is translated here, for the men knew he had fled from the presence of the Lord, for Jonah had told them, so apparently Jonah had added, I am a Hebrew; I fear the Lord, the God of heaven who that

made the sea and the dry land. And I am running away from him. And they were desperately afraid.

So now Jonah is really in a mess. He’s been disobedient. He’s unhappy. He’s in despair. He’s been defeated. Now he’s in the midst of a storm that may mean his life and the life of others, and so we are given a good look at the doctrine of Christian crawling. Do you know what a crawfish does when it sees danger? It paddles backwards very swiftly. Christians crawl all the time.

What was his trouble? Point one, he had neglected the word of God. He had disobeyed the express teaching of God to him. That was the beginning of his difficulty; the word of God. Now it was not that he had not prayed. It was not that he had not given testimony. It was that he had disobeyed the word of God. And oh if I could ever get over to you how important it is for you to know God’s word, I would do it. For I fully believe that this is the most important thing in our Christian life, is to come to know the truth of holy scripture.

But when we neglect God’s word, sooner or later we’ll be neglecting the prayer life. So Jonah was asleep. That was his second difficulty. He had neglected the word, and now he neglected prayer. And apparently he had neglected to testify to who he was, because now he’s in the ship and they have to drag out from him the expression of his faith.

It is very important that we testify. It is very important that we pray. It is very important that we read the word of God. But it is the word that is the fundamental thing. Now I think also that our right relationship to the word leads inevitably to these other things. I know of some Christians how are so busy criticizing the Four Spiritual Laws – and by the way, they do need criticizing; they need some good theological cleansing, and I am all for that – but at the same time, I’m not very much impressed by ones who criticize but who don’t give out any kind of laws.

Let us remember that it is important for us to have the proper scriptural balance, and if we stick to the word of God, then we don’t have to worry about what people are saying, and we won’t become disturbed, as so often we become disturbed.

Well now at this point, the men exceedingly afraid, they say to Jonah, “Jonah, what shall we do for thee that the sea may be calm for us?” For the sea was raging and tempestuous. Literally, the Hebrew text says, *balak ca’ar*; it is growing and storming, or it is growing more and more stormy, or stormier and stormier.

Jonah, appealed to for guidance from the heather, perhaps to save Israel – for that’s still on his mind – suggests that they make him walk the plank. So he said, take me up and throw me into the sea, for so shall the sea be calm for you, for I know that for my sake, this great tempest is upon you. He’s still thinking about Israel. Still thinks that perhaps if he is destroyed, then perhaps Israel might be saved from the Assyrians. So he’s willing to die.

Now the text says, rather interestingly – I think, rather amazingly – “Nevertheless the men rowed.” As a matter of fact, the Hebrew text gives the impression that they really began to row. They began to “dig.” And you can see these men taking big, deep strokes with their oars as they try to make the dry land, because they remember that this God, this Jehovah, is the man who made the heavens and the sea and also the dry land, so perhaps if they can deposit the prophet on dry land, everything will be alright. So they rowed hard to bring it to land.

And I think I’m really a little surprised at this. The world seems more honorable than the church. These men do not want to throw Jonah out. I think if I had been there and one of the heathen, I would have tossed him over immediately. But they are disturbed – they are beginning to be under conviction themselves, apparently.

And so finally, they pray. “Wherefore they cried unto the LORD, and said, We beseech thee, O LORD, we beseech thee, let us not perish for this man's life, and lay not upon us innocent blood: for thou, O LORD, hast done as it pleased thee.” Now I want to

tell you that there is always evidence of new life when we begin to think Calvinistically. For thou, O LORD, hast done as it pleased thee – these men have a lot more intelligence than a lot of Christians who do not really believe that God is sovereign, who do not really believe that God is able to control this universe and carry out his plans in a way that ultimately bring glory and honor to him, though we may not understand something of the way in which he is working at the present time. LORD, hast done as it pleased thee.

So we should not get upset when we read in the Bible that there is an elect company. We should not be surprised and disturbed when we read that God has his own sheep who belong to him. And he has called upon us who proclaim the word to proclaim the word that he through the Holy Spirit may bring men to the Lord, and we shall not be surprised, we shall not be disturbed if he is doing his work and doing it as it pleases him, and he should be honored and glorified though men cavil and complain about the fact that God, in his sovereign grace, is making a difference through the preaching of the word. Now you do not have to believe everything I say to you about election. The only thing I ask you to do is to go to your Bible, and sooner or later you and I will be in the same company. I earnestly believe. I earnestly believe with all my heart that this is the teaching of God’s holy word.

So they took up Jonah, and they cast him forth into the sea, and the sea ceased from its raging. You remember that when the Lord Jesus was in the stern of the boat asleep, and the disciples came to him and said, “Master, master, carest thou not that we perish?!” And Mark says Jesus arose and he rebuked the wind and the sea, saying, “Peace, be still!” And there was a great calm. What a magnificent picture.

One of the words that Mark uses was the word that was used for the muzzling of a dog. And actually what Jesus did was to rise up in that boat, and the sea was raging, and the wind was churning. One moment, Jesus was up above the disciples; the next moment, he was down in the waves. The waves were actually flowing over the boat, one of the gospel accounts tells us, and he arose in the boat – if I were a painter, I would love

to capture that picture – and he arose in the boat and he turned to the wind that was raging and he said, “Hush!” And then to the waves, “Back to your kennels,” as Dr. Donald Grey Barnhouse used to render it. “Back to your kennels,” and there was an immediate calm.

I grew upon the water in Charleston, South Carolina. I have never yet seen the wind calm after a storm except that the waves continued to surge and move for some hours afterwards. But you see, when the Lord Jesus spoke, he was the one who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and the dry land, and when he speaks, the elements obey. He is lord of the bread and can feed 5,000 with a few little loaves and fishes, but he is also the lord of the billows, and he can calm the sea. And when Jonah went down into that sea there was immediate calm, and the sailors were amazed. And the text of Scripture said, in verse 16, “Then the men feared the Lord exceedingly.” I think they were converted.

They feared the Lord, and they sacrificed. And they used the word – this text uses the word, *zabach*, which means, ordinarily, “to slaughter for sacrifice.” And so, since they probably did not have any fiery sacrifice on a boat that was wooden (you probably wouldn’t have any like that), they probably went down into the hold of that ship, took one of the animals which had been carried as cargo, and they slew the animal and they offered up a sacrifice to this God the prophet has spoken about – the God Jehovah – to whom they had prayed and who had answered their prayers. And so in effect they acknowledged that this God is reached by way of sacrifice. And so they were convicted, and they were converted, and then they made vows – they were consecrated, if I may put it that way.

There are lots of men who make vows in the midst of danger and forget about them afterwards. But these men made vows after the danger was over, and I presume therefore that it was genuine. And so, they were converted.

Now, I see by the time that I’m not going to have time to talk about the typology of this incident, but I do want to say a few words about the generalizations that come home to me from this little account.

The first thing that I want you to notice is that our sins affect others. The greatest sufferers are not always the greatest sinners. Israel had to suffer from Assyria and Babylonia, but Israel suffered because she belonged to God. She had to suffer discipline. A rebellious prophet may cause untold suffering. In fact, I think we could even put it this way, that a rebellious preacher of the word of God is more dangerous than an atomic bomb. Or let me put it down on the level of those who do not stand behind a pulpit to preach the word every now and then. A Christian out of fellowship with God wreaks trouble and peril and misery that is more significant than almost anything you can imagine. Homes, families, and churches and communities can be wrecked by a Christian out of fellowship with God.

Not long ago I was in California. A preacher’s wife came to me. He had been a graduate of the finest seminary in the United States. He had had three successful pastorates, each one larger than the one before, and the last was a gigantic-sized church in one of the western states where 1500 people gathered every Sunday morning to hear the word of God. And he was a magnificent preacher.

But he had finally stood in the pulpit of the church one Sunday evening and said, “I have been living a lie,” and he resigned. The church only discovered later how much of a lie it had been. It was a big one. And it’s been a few years past. And the wife of the preacher came to me and said, “Lewis, I’d like to talk with you for a few moments.” She mentioned her husband and said, “He’s married again, as you know, but he’s not happy. He called me the other night and said he’s beginning to get back into the word of God. But he’s unhappy. And perhaps you didn’t know it, Lewis, but I’m married again, too, and I’m not happy either. And furthermore, we’re having awful trouble with our

teenaged kid.” Our sins affect others. And often, the sins of a Christian out of fellowship with God can cause untold misery and disturbance.

Another young man also attended our theological seminary. Did not graduate. After fifteen to seventeen years, divorced his wife. Has been married three times now, I think. And I met the first wife some time ago, and she spoke about the difficulty they were having with their children.

Then this morning, someone from our congregation handed me a letter from their child and said, would like to read this? And what a thrill it was. Began with something like this, “Just wanted to let you know, (she’s off at college) how much I love you, how much I appreciate the way in which you have brought me up in the home, and what it has meant to me. And I just want to tell you what a wonderful husband you have. I’ve been looking around for one like him, and I’m much discouraged. There aren’t any like him around.” What daughter has not passed through that experience with her wonderful father.

But then there was one thing interesting in it to me. I think more interesting than anything else. “I used to think that many of the things you did were odd and queer (or something like that), but now I know.” If a man out of fellowship with God can cause untold misery, how wonderful it is to see the blessing that comes from one who stays in the will of God.

There’s another lesson. The inconsistency of God’s people is often a marvel to the world. It is the heathen shipmaster who has to call upon the Hebrew prophet to pray.

And now the last lesson, and then I think I’m going to have to stop. God uses us even when we are out of his will. That to me is the most amazing thing in this whole story. God uses us even when we are out of his will. Jonah is a disobedient prophet. But finally forced by circumstances to give his confession, he gives his confession: I’m an Hebrew, I worship Jehovah, he’s the God of heaven, he’s made the sea and dry land. I belong to him. And through the testimony of a wayward prophet, the mariners are

brought to the Lord. God uses us even when we are out of his will – don’t ever stand up to an audience and say, “God uses us only if we are in his will.” That’s untrue to God’s word [Johnson pounds on pulpit].

This is what I keep saying to young people, trying to say to students. For of all the things that you do and say for our Lord Jesus Christ, above all discover what God says in his word. Do not listen to what people say. Judge everything by the text of holy scripture. And one of the teachings of the word of God is that upon occasion, he does use us even when we are out of his will. I’m not recommending that. I think he uses us more effectively when we are in his will, as we shall see in Jonah’s life. But he often uses us when we are out of his will because he wants to convince us that it is all of grace.

He doesn’t use because we’re wonderful. He doesn’t use us because we have intelligence, understanding. He uses us sovereignly because of his plans and programs. Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer believed that men should preach, and at Dallas Theological Seminary we’ve never had any female students. We’re not angry with the female students. We like them. Girls around the country come to me and say, how can I go to Dallas Seminary? I say, I’m sorry you cannot. There is an indirect way [laughter]. But you cannot go. He believed that men should preach, and we never had women speakers in chapel for that reason. Not that women don’t have the gift of teaching; they often do. Sometimes, sadly, a greater gift than their husbands who teach.

But one day we had a visitor to chapel, a graduate, who pulled a little trick on Dr. Chafer. He was the scheduled speaker, but he had a woman with him, a fine woman. And he got up and he said he thought – he was a missionary – he thought that the audience would obtain more information about the work, that they would hear a more significant message, instead of his speaking that morning the lady should speak. And so, he introduced her. And she took the chapel hour.

And at the conclusion, we all knew Dr. Chafer’s a little upset over that. And so at the conclusion, I can still remember him standing up – and he was a very kindly man;

much more kindly than I am – but he stood up and he said, during the course of the message he had gained the impression, unfortunately, that the reasons for the success of the work was the skill and the spirituality, particularly, of the lady who was giving the message. And so Dr. Chafer got up and he said, simply, these words, he said, “I’m so thankful that God uses often not because of what we are, but in spite of what we are.” [Laughter] And we got the message.

God used Jonah in spite of what he was. And I’ll tell you the truth, I am so thankful that God uses us in spite of what we are. I want to be in the center of his will so that he may use me more fully, but I am thankful that my God is a sovereign God and his work does not depend on me.

Our time’s up. If you’re here this morning and you have not yet believed in Jesus Christ, we remind you of the cross, point you to him who loved you and gave himself for you. You may become a Christian by simply turning to Jesus Christ in your heart and saying, thank you Lord for dying for me. I take you as my personal Savior. That moment you are born again. You are forgiven. You are given a righteousness that avails before God. You become a Christian. But that is a decision of the heart, in the inner man. May God help you to make it if you have not made it. Let’s stand for the benediction.

[Prayer] Father, we thank Thee for the privilege of the ministry of the word of God. O Father, help us to be subject to it.

Deliver us, O God, from Christian declension, departure from the word, and from the guidance of the Spirit.

And now may grace go with us and peace through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.