

# Jonah: Hard Lessons Learned

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**Bible Text:** Jonah 4

**Preached on:** Monday, January 1, 1990

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I will invite you to open your Bible in the book of Jonah and I will read for you the last 11 verses that constitute that fourth chapter that tell the end or the climax of this man's story. Before I read it for you, and without intent to insult anybody's intelligence, I would like to go back and just rehearse the salient points that are part of the story.

When we meet this young man I don't know who he is. I hear by oral tradition that he was the son of the widow of Sarepta. I do not know that I can depend on oral tradition, but when I meet him he already has established contact with God. He has already been to that meeting where the gospel to the world was presented and he viewed his heart as being in fellowship with God and determined when the call was given for someone to represent God on the foreign field that he was capable and qualified and willing to do it.

He didn't know that God didn't share his prejudice.

When God said that he wanted him to go to Nineveh there was a kind of repulsion, the concept was unacceptable. Ninevites were very wicked people. Nineveh—whenever they went to bring dominion over a city—would take the first couple that they met within the city once they got inside and spare their lives. Then they would take the next 100 people—man, woman or child—and they would decapitate them. They would take the heads and put them in heaps of 50 on either side of the city gates. And that was only to let you know that they were in the city.

The couple whose lives were spared became the witnesses of the atrocities that followed. They then went ahead of the Ninevites to the next city and they witnessed to the next city the events that were about to happen unless there was compliance with their demands. And nobody would like the Ninevites.

God's servant decided that he wasn't going, that in preference to Nineveh, which was the major city to the east, he was going to go west to the periphery of civilization to a place called Tarshish.

Tarshish, as far as we know, is represented by the British Isles today. It is as far west as you can go to that wall of water we know as the Atlantic and as far as civilization had

reached. And it was his intention that he would get to the periphery of civilization, as far away from Nineveh as it was possible to go.

So he went down to Joppa and graphically the Scripture tells us “he paid the fare thereof.”<sup>1</sup> You realize that when you walk in obedience to the will of God he takes care of all your expenses. When you take a deliberate step outside of the will of God you pay the fare thereof. And it was a very costly fare to pay.

He got on a vessel that was going to Tarshish. They went out into the Mediterranean waters on the sea lanes of that day and a storm came up. And it was no moderate storm. It was nothing that was common or usual to them. It was so tempestuous that it caused trouble for the men that were in the boat. And those, though they were seaworthy sailors recognized that they were in peril. And if they were going to be able to save their lives and salvage the ship they were going to have to get rid of the cargo.

You know that when you get rid of the cargo and you are on a merchant vessel, that it is a critical and a serious situation. But it didn't seem to help them. When they did that they still decided, “Our lives are in serious jeopardy.” And as is always the case, the last resort, “Let's go to prayer.”

And everybody went to prayer except the one man who was the problem. If a man regard iniquity in his heart, the Lord will not hear him.<sup>2</sup> And he knew there was no sense in him spending his time in prayer because he was willfully disobedient and they found him asleep. They brought him on board. I guess they must have been a Baptist group because they had a committee meeting to decide what they were going to do with this man.

He informed them that the best thing that they could do was to throw him overboard, get rid of him. He seems to have a bent, a proclivity toward ending his life, but didn't have the courage to take it himself. And he wanted them to execute him and throw him into the tempestuous waters and let him drown.

They didn't know what to do, but decided that they would do what he said, recognizing that if he be a servant of Jehovah and if Jehovah be the Lord of the sea and the wind and the land, then they may be jeopardizing their lives more seriously. But they decided that they would throw him overboard. And when they threw him overboard two miracles happened. One miracle was a fish was at the side of the boat. It had its head protruding from the waters and its mouth was open to receive God's servant and it swallowed him alive into its stomach. The second miracle that happened was the sea became calm. And you could have looked across what was at one time a light threatening sea, tempestuous and it would look like a billiard table.

Jonah was taken alive into the fish.

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<sup>1</sup> Jonah 1:3

<sup>2</sup> See Psalm 66:18

I did my undergraduate work at Texas Christian University in Fort Worth and we were not anywhere established by the polls in athletics and sports, but we did have a young man on campus who was an All American football player. And that made him a very privileged and honored person on the campus. His major was biology and I was a student of biology at the time and when a teacher had to be absent they gave him the permission to come and take the class. And I don't know what it was that excited his interest in it, but he made a statement in class to which I felt deeply offended and decided I would speak to him after the class was over.

He said, "Science has never found a fish in Mediterranean waters with a throat large enough to swallow a man without crushing his bones together in his throat. Therefore we know that the story of Jonah is not a literal story. It is only an analogy."

I went to him when it was over and I said, "Excuse me, but you would have no way of knowing this. I happen to be a Baptist minister and you greatly offended me."

He said, "I what way?"

I said, "Well, you made two fundamental mistakes when you made your reference to Jonah. Mistake number one you made was, you made a god out of science. You assumed that if science hasn't found it, it doesn't exist. And if science has discovered it, it is imperative that everybody accept it. You are making a god out of science. Science may tell me where a star will be four billion years from now if nothing alters its course in the universe. But while it can tell me that, it can't tell me where the next dandelion will come up in my front yard. It is a sacred cow. There is an authority that is higher than science. And that authority is the immutable, invincible, infallible, inspired revelation of God.

"The second mistake you made was you didn't read the story. The Bible said God prepared a great fish. You're fishing in Mediterranean waters looking for some of its great grandchildren and nothing is recorded about any of its parents or any of its children. God prepared a fish. It was there at that precise moment, at that precise place or location and if God said it, that would settle it. And it took God's servant into its stomach and brought him down to the bottoms of the mountains in the depths of the ocean."

To all intent and purpose, that is the first submarine ride recorded in history. Well, not quite the same, but similar.

I don't know what happened in your case or in my case, but if I had been in his predicament I think I would have done what he did. He decided to get right with God.

He said something that revealed to me that he had confidence that God would hear him. He said in the second chapter and in the fourth verse, "Then I said, I am cast out of thy sight; yet I will look again toward thy holy temple."<sup>3</sup> If you utter those words and you are in the belly of a fish and the fish is in the bowels of the ocean, for you to expect that

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<sup>3</sup> Jonah 2:4

you are going to go back and look toward this temple, you must believe that he will hear prayer and he will forgive transgression and he will heal the sin sick soul.

He responded and returned to God in faith.

The fish then steered a course toward the shoreline. Where? I have no idea. I assume when he got to the end of his prayer he let out a shout from the belly of the fish. He said, “Salvation is of the LORD.”<sup>4</sup> And if you will excuse the pun, that’s more than the fish could stomach. I don’t know what the fish did. It said vomit, burp. I’m not quite sure how a fish gets rid of the contents of the stomach, but when it did, it got rid of Jonah. He must have been horribly smelly. He must have been in a deplorable condition. He found himself on the shoreline and metaphorically God was standing there waiting for him. And God was pointing in the direction of Nineveh.

Too many times we believe that if we rebel against God that we will cause God to change his mind. But God still wanted him to go to Nineveh, still wanted him to declare to that nation that in 40 days he was coming in judgment. And like a dog whipped with this tail between his legs, he took off to Nineveh.

I don’t know if you have ever been to the Assyrian room in London at the British Museum. It is worth going to. It puts goose bumps on your body. They have got those two large lions that were taken from the gates of the city of Nineveh through which Jonah walked. And when he got into the city it would be a three day journey for him to get to the far end of the city. And he began to preach the message that God had given him to preach.

The news of it came to the king. And he ceremonially stood up, took off his robe, put it beside him, dressed himself in sackcloth and sat on ashes and left an edict of command that every noble, every man and every beast eat nothing, drink nothing, show your remorse before God if peradventure it will change his mind. And the whole city seemed to have turned to God.

And that is where this peculiar, mysterious fourth chapter begins. Can I read it for you? It says there that: “It displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was very angry.”<sup>5</sup>

Stop for one moment. Let me ask you the question. What does it take for a man to be in the will of God? If you could find the right man and he was at the right place and he was there at the right time and he was doing the right thing, would you conclude he was in the will of God? Because Jonah was the right man, Nineveh was the right place, the eve of judgment was the right time and preaching was the right activity. But nobody can convince me that he was in the will of God. It displeased him. There is more than motion. There is a question of motive that comes into the will of God.

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<sup>4</sup> Jonah 2:9

<sup>5</sup> Jonah 4:1

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. Therefore now, O LORD, take, I beseech thee, my life from me; for it is better for me to die than to live.<sup>6</sup>

There he is at it again.

Then said the LORD, Doest thou well to be angry?

So Jonah went out of the city...

This is now on the east side.

...and sat on the east side of the city, and there made him a booth, and sat under it in the shadow, till he might see what would become of the city. And the LORD God prepared a gourd, and made it to come up over Jonah, that it might be a shadow over his head, to deliver him from his grief. So Jonah was exceeding glad of the gourd. But God prepared a worm when the morning rose the next day, and it smote the gourd that it withered. And it came to pass, when the sun did arise, that God prepared a vehement east wind; and the sun beat upon the head of Jonah, that he fainted, and wished in himself to die, and said, It is better for me to die than to live.<sup>7</sup>

There he goes again

And God said to Jonah, Doest thou well to be angry for the gourd? And he said, I do well to be angry, even unto death. Then said the LORD, Thou hast had pity on the gourd, for the which thou hast not laboured, neither madest it grow; which came up in a night, and perished in a night: And should not I spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than sixscore thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle?<sup>8</sup>

And I feel like I need to keep reading. What a peculiar way to end a story.

Somewhere in the content of context there is a secret that tells me what happened in chapter five that never got written. I have no question in my mind that this person came into conformity in the will of God. But what was it that brought it about? He has had the harrowing experience in the storm. He has had the frightening experience in the fish. He has had the aggravating experience in the city. And none of that moved him to reconcile with the will of God for his life.

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<sup>6</sup> Jonah 4:2-3

<sup>7</sup> Jonah 4:3-8

<sup>8</sup> Jonah 4:9-11

What was it that did? I am hazarding a guess and I admit that, but I believe the secret of the story is told in the first five words of the seventh verse. “But God prepared a worm...”<sup>9</sup>

I am speaking to you contemporary, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, recognizing that his God and our God are one and the same, recognizing that his proclivity and ours might be one and the same and hoping that in your experience the counterpart to the ministry of the worm has already taken place.

A little worm smote a gourd tree and the gourd tree withered. And that worm taught Jonah something that he had not realized before.

Like what?

Like in the first place something about the greatness of God he had not realized before. How great is God? Well, look at the beginning of his life. His relationship with God, his call to the mission field, those are moving experiences when they happen in life. Going down deliberately to get away from the presence of the Lord and trying to get to Tarshish to get to the periphera. And the greatness of the story and the greatness of the calm and the greatness of the fish and the greatness of the survival and the greatness of the movement of God in the city of Nineveh. Do you realize that in the contents of this infallible book there is not a single recorded revival from page...from cover to cover that covers the largeness of this that happened in Jonah’s disobedience. And then there is the gourd tree. And then there is the worm.

See, what Jonah’s concern was he could find God in his greatness, in the superlatives, in the majestic and the magnificent, in the mammoth, but he suddenly discovered that God was great enough that he found him in the miniature.

I rehearsed—I don’t know if it was here—but recently I told the story, but when I first came to this country and I was ministering at the little church East Des Moines I was staying in a home that...what I would consider to be a farm house. But all of the people were employed and they vacated the house all day and they left me alone to prepare my messages for that evening’s service promising me that when they came back they would cook me a good warm meal. But in the interval I was to go to the kitchen, open the refrigerator and make myself whatever form of nourishment would satisfy me until they got home.

And when it came lunchtime I left my desk in my bedroom, left my books sitting where they were, went downstairs to the kitchen and got something. I do not remember what, but it was very simple in the form of a sandwich. I poured myself a glass of milk to go with it. I enjoyed the nourishment, but was anxious to get back up to my room again and felt the tendency to do what American people did. They had gratings in the sink. And they took their dishes and they washed the crumbs off their dishes and sat them in the

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<sup>9</sup> Jonah 4:7

grating and let them drip dry. And I just newly from Britain had not observed that kind of activity before and felt a little bit embarrassed about doing it, but when in Rome... So I decided I would do it.

I was walking away from the kitchen sink when I noticed that she had a plaque on the wall above the sink. And the plaque read with the words, “Not somehow, but triumphantly.”

I went back up to my room got down at my desk and went back to recapture the thoughts that were in my mind before the lunch break. And I could see it on my page, “Not somehow, but triumphantly.”

Well, I was the only person in the house so I got up and I started walking back and forth in the space that I had available and started saying to myself the thoughts that would surely capture what I had left off and found myself saying it, “Not somehow, but triumphantly.”

I thought, “That’s going to bother my whole day. I’ll not get a bit of work done if I don’t master that.”

I went back downstairs. I stood in the center of the kitchen. I put my hand on my hip. I looked at that sign. I said out loud—grateful nobody was there to hear me—“What is she doing with that there? Why is that not at the front door? That is where visitors are met. That is where company comes in. That is where the world comes in contact. Why doesn’t she tell that message to them? Why is that not in the den? That is where they sit. And sometimes idle conversations transgresses the purpose of God and that would be a good warning to be in a place like that. Why does she have it in a kitchen? Does she think that she can wash dishes and cook meals to the glory of God?”

And then it dawned on me. That’s the worm.

It is easy to see God in the fish. It is easy to see God in the sabbath. It is easy to see God in big crusade. But what about the class with just two or three children and the weekly responsibility of nourishing their souls in truth?

Can you see God in the classroom? Can you see God on Monday morning? Can you see God at the typewriter in the work office? Can you see God in the casual conversations that happen between people? Or is God confined for you to the spectacular?

Until God is able to invade the non-entities of life you couldn’t be in his will.

I have to know that every moment of my day, every brain cell in my body, every drop of blood in my veins belongs to him. I have to somehow capture for me—in spite of the fact that I must have intercourse with people in the public relationship—the consciousness of the presence of God in my life. God has got to become so great to me

that he invades every little, unimportant mundane part of my experience. Unless God is that great, like Jonah, you can't be in his will.

It brings me to a second lesson I believe that Jonah learned from that little worm. And it is a corresponding lesson. It is as mandatory that I learn this lesson as I learn the lesson of God's greatness. And it boils down, basically, to man's nothingness, to our impotence, our unworthiness.

A worm would suggest something to Jonah that it probably would not suggest to us. It was a low contemptible creature. It lived under the surface of the earth. It cowered away from the gaze of mankind.

"Thou worm, Jacob."<sup>10</sup>

"What is man, that thou art mindful of him?"<sup>11</sup>

"I am a worm, and no man."<sup>12</sup>

"Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched."<sup>13</sup>

You see, here was the proposition that God was giving to Jonah. Jonah was saying, "I am your evangelist. My name is Billy Graham. Without me your tide, your handicap...I am on strike. I want you to meet me at the bargaining table and I want us to discuss some propositions. You sent me here with a message, now you do what you promised you were going to do in that message and I am on strike until you do it."

And God said, in essence, to his servant, "Well, I guess there are some things we do need to get straightened out. But while you are not doing anything, could you move aside for just a moment and let me bring a substitute in?"

And he brought a worm.

And if ever a great prophet and great preacher got a lesson in humility Jonah learned from that little worm, "I am not very important. God could get by easily without me. I amount to the insignificant. As great as he is I am nothing."

I said it is a corresponding vision. One brings the other. One requires the other.

Do you remember when Isaiah got his call to ministry? "In the year that king Uzziah died."<sup>14</sup> That was his hero. And God had to move his hero out of the way so he could

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<sup>10</sup> Isaiah 41:14

<sup>11</sup> Psalm 8:4

<sup>12</sup> Psalm 22:6

<sup>13</sup> Mark 9:44, 46, 48

<sup>14</sup> Isaiah 6:1



say, “I saw the Lord and he was high and lifted up and his train filled the temple.”<sup>15</sup> And there were seraphim that moved around his presence and they said one to another, “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD God almighty and the earth is full of his glory.”<sup>16</sup>

What did Isaiah do? He got one glimpse of the holiness of God and he fell prostrate before that God and he said, “I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen.”<sup>17</sup>

You see, you tell me how important you are and I will tell you how correspondingly big your God is because you can't have a God of the dimensions that bring us into center of his will until you have got the recognition of the fact that you before him are nothing. And if there is anything to your credit in this life, it is attributed wholly, solely and only to his glory and his honor and his grace.

Do you remember Job? Wealthiest man of his community, brought to a place where in a moment he has lost everything and when he was going back home he had to stop by at the bank and file bankruptcy. And by the time he got home his health was broken down and his body is covered with boils and he is scraping himself with pieces of pottery. And his friends came by. His sight was so pathetic they couldn't say a word to him for seven days. And when they did get the courage to speak they said to him, in essence, “Something is wrong in your life.”

“No,” he said, “I protest. You don't understand.”

Perfect and an upright man, one that escheweth evil.<sup>18</sup> No, you have got the wrong estimate.

“No,” they said, “the evidence is clear. God is displeased and you need to get on your knees and confess your sins and be humble before your God.”

Well, the argument goes on through the book. When it comes toward the end of the book, God decides to visit in a whirlwind. And I see Job sitting up in his ash pile. I hear him saying to himself in his thinking, “I hope my friends are listening. I want them to catch this.”

And when God finally spoke God said to him, “Job, where were you when I laid the foundations of this earth? Where were you when I shut up the sea with doors? Where were you when I made clouds for a swaddling band around it?”<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> See Isaiah 6:1-2

<sup>16</sup> See Isaiah 6:3

<sup>17</sup> Isaiah 6:5

<sup>18</sup> See Job 1:8

<sup>19</sup> See Job 38

And Job fell on his face before God and he said, “I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear; and now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself and I repent in dust and ashes.”<sup>20</sup>

So important.

I travel around the world preaching in different churches nearly every weekend. I have been to churches pathetically rent and split and have found without one single exception the churches that have been weakened in their ministry is usually caused by one man with a proud overestimate of his value and not willing to eat humble pie and say, “I am nothing and God is everything.”

Let me go into the ministry of the apostle Paul. He writes to the Corinthian Church and he says that Paul is the chiefest of apostles.<sup>21</sup> And he writes about his Savior and he said, “We preach Christ crucified.”<sup>22</sup>

I want you to recognize that is fundamental truth. That is basic. But Paul, a little later, writes to the Ephesians and he says, in essence, to them, “Would you allow me to deviate for a little bit and change my posture?” It is not Paul the chiefest of apostles. It is Paul less than the least of all saints.<sup>23</sup> It is not simply Christ crucified. It is Christ the head of the Church.

And then when time passed by he writes his last epistles to young evangelist Timothy and he said, “Timothy, let me do one more readjustment.” It is not Paul the chiefest of apostles. It is not Paul less than the least of all saints. It is, “a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief.”<sup>24</sup>

And it is not Christ on the cross and it is not simply Christ the head of the Church. He is King of Kings and Lord of Lords who only hath immortality.<sup>25</sup>

The balance each other out. And you can tell the estimate of the greatness of God in your life and in your ministry when you can put your finger on your own pulse and find out what am I apart from him?

When I was a young convert I believed I did God a favor when I came to him. I am ashamed of it today. I look back over my experience and wonder: Was I really saved? Or did my salvation come as he added knowledge and grace to my life? And all I can tell you today is there is nothing I value to be of value in my life, but what he has given to me. And he has become supremely my Lord as well as my Savior. And I humbly

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<sup>20</sup> See Job 42:5-6

<sup>21</sup> See 2 Corinthians 11:5, 12:11

<sup>22</sup> 1 Corinthians 1:23

<sup>23</sup> See Ephesians 3:8

<sup>24</sup> 1 Timothy 1:15

<sup>25</sup> 1 Timothy 6:15-16

acknowledge that apart from him I have nothing worthy of two minutes investment. Like this man Jonah I need to learn how great God is and I need to learn how little man is.

And there is a third lesson and with this I conclude. Not simply God's greatness, not simply man's nothingness, but that little worm taught him something about the value of souls to which he was unconscious.

When you go back and look at it, God prepared a gourd. He was glad for that. This gourd was very important to him. It was the token of God's favor in his life. But God prepared a worm and the worm smote the gourd.

Do you know when I was just a young fellow I lived on a farm in Monaghan. The men used to come into the farm because my uncle owned the grocery store, the post office and it was all tied up in the same place. And the men would come in and they would do some plowing before breakfast time. And I would get up and go out with them. I was only but a whippersnapper at the time.

I can remember that big steel blade cutting down into the dirt and as it cut through the dirt it would pull it and turn it upside down. And big fat juicy worms would be on the very top. My boyish mind, I didn't know worms. I took a spade one day and I cut down into the middle of one and to my surprise one half wiggled that way and the other half wiggled that way. And I started quizzing myself from then until breakfast was over: What in the world did I do? What if the mouth is on that end and the belly is on this end and the animal gets hungry? I mean, I didn't know what I had done.

How does a worm smite a gourd tree? I have no idea. Does it find a crack in the bark, enlarge it, drain the pith from the center of it until it is an empty shell and then let the wind touch it and it falls to the ground? But the minute it falls to the ground God's servant jumps up and said, "I don't want to live anymore. You are a ruthless, sovereign God. If gourd trees can suffer under your sovereignty like that I'd rather be dead."

And God said, "Jonah, do you have a right to be angry for the gourd? For the which thou hast not labored neither madest it grow, which came up in a night and perished in a night and should not I spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than six score thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand?"<sup>26</sup> I assume that they are children. What the population of the city is, it is vast and beyond my imagination.

"Do you mean to tell me that you will go to defend a gourd tree, but you will let the children of Adam suffer, perish under the judgment of God and your priorities are all mixed up?"

There is no way you can be in the will of God until the mind of God captures your heart and the value of people that are living and dying without a Savior.

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<sup>26</sup> See Jonah 4:9-11

Boy, where it became vivid to me... I was 22 years when I first came to this country. I came back, went to seminary and then found what to me is a charming, beautiful sweetheart, a blonde headed Swede from Minnesota that spoke with a slight Swedish accent and I married her. And she said to me, “ Ken, if you are going into the ministry and you want to have authority to speak from the sacred desk, you are going to have to do something to get an education. You are going to have to go to college.”

Now back in my day you didn't have to go to school after you were 14 years of age and I was there where I should have been two years previously, but I reached my 14<sup>th</sup> year and I gladly quit. I had no high school.

In this country, in my country, you can't go to college if you haven't been to high school. But I had been to Bible College. And I went down to Texas Christian University administration and I said to them, as I produced evidence that I had been a student. There was no keeping or reserving credits that you could pass, but I gave them evidence that I had been a student in those two institutions and I asked them impudently how much time of credit will you give me if I enroll in your school?

And he looked at what I had given him and he looked at me and he said, “I am sorry, but I can only give you one year.”

Well I reluctantly, as far as he knew, took it. I was scared he was going to ask me to sit a college entrance exam, but I got into the second year. Now that was an experience. I was 27 years of age. I am on a campus with girls that chew bubblegum and wear bobby socks. And I am wondering, “What am I doing in this crowd?”

And when we got into the history class it always amazed me because what startled me—and I didn't understand—they had no problem with. You mention a name. They knew if it a person or if it was a place or if it was an event.

One day the history teacher came in and he said, “We are going to have a pop quiz today, but nobody is going to fail. I have decided that if you get one answer correct I am going to pass you. And I brought one question everybody knows how to answer. From where and to where did Paul Revere ride?”

Paul Revere. That could have been a first cousin to John Deere. I didn't know who this guy was. I didn't know what he was riding or where he was going or why he was doing it. I knew nothing. I listened with rapt attention as they were listening to what they already knew.

One day in class he gave us an anecdote that touched me. It was about the end of the Civil War. Lincoln walked into a room where a group of officers were meeting with a large map of Richmond, Virginia on the table. And they were planning the triumphant entry of Lincoln into Richmond. And he took the map from them and dismissed them

and told them they could not meet again to that purpose until whatever happened there was history.

I understand tall lanky bearded Lincoln walked down the middle of sunlit sandy streets, listened to the chanting of the black people in the alley ways as they were singing in their inimical way their thanks to God for liberation. He went up to the room for the signing of papers. There was a soldier on guard that gave him a salute. It was known he would always respond. He would raise his hand. He would raise his hat. He would nod his head. He would give a smile. On this occasion he did nothing. He walked straight into the room. He got behind the Jefferson Davis table. He put his elbows on the table. He opened up his hands. He let his face fall into his hands and slight convulsion moved his body. And the soldiers at the door said, "I saw it, a little tributary of tears seep between his fingers."

He said, "I can't believe that. He's a politician. What's he crying for?"

Teenage American boys spilled their blood on battlefields and might have lived another 60 years. In a day of reconstruction that's not worth crying about.

I am in a ministry where the people to whom I have to minister have undying souls that must spend them forever in heaven or else in hell. And I don't know the last time I was so moved with compassion to their concern that I got out of my bed in the middle of the night and got down on my knees and I prayed, "Oh, God, with passion help me to reach the perishing for Christ."

So easy to hide behind duty, so easy when you are assigned by the church to visit, to go and knock on the door. But remember Lot. He seemed like one that mocked unto his sons-in-law.<sup>27</sup>

Oh, God, help me to speak to people that don't know my Savior so they know I am for real. I am genuinely concerned. Their souls are perishing. How can I get down on my knees when I recognize that the almighty God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son and I don't share any of his sympathies with the world? God smite me with conviction. Help me to see that if I am going to be in the center of God's will, I have got to know his greatness. I have got to know my nothingness and I have got to know their preciousness.

Can I close with just saying: It cost him a gourd tree. But what is a gourd tree?

It is everything.

There was nothing that he owned that didn't perish in a storm. He had nothing left, but the clothes on his body. And in tenderness God gave him a gourd tree. And then God smote it.

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<sup>27</sup> See Genesis 19:14

Am I anywhere close to correct? I remember I was teaching in Bible college in Springfield, Missouri when my first boy came into the world. I can tell you when I had taken my wife to the hospital that night I made my mind up then, "I am not going to class. I am not going to school. I am going to wait until this event happens no matter what...how long it takes."

I remember when that little boy was being taken home and I helped his mother while I held him in my arms and I helped her down the stairway so we could get to the parking lot. And I walked with her by the arm and that child in my hand and I talked with God. And I acknowledged to him, "This little boy can become too important to me. I can't let him step in the way of my ministry. I want to hand him over to his mother and I want you to give her the grace that she could become a father and a mother to the child and that I, independent, don't become all wrapped up in family concerns now that he has entered into my home."

I will never forget. It was a summer afternoon. He had come to where he as able to walk. He had little chubby arms and chubby legs. I came home for lunch that day. I pulled my car into the driveway. The front door opened and I saw nobody who opened it and this little blue eyed, fair haired boy stepped out into the sunlight and he came running with his arms up and the only thing he could say was, "Dada." And when he got to my feet I leaned down and put my arms around him and picked him up and I said to my Savior, "He's a gourd tree. If there is anything will keep me honest and keep me straight I don't want worms touching my boy. And I want to commit my heart afresh to thee that I will put you in priority in my life so that I can salvage my gourd tree."

It is my opinion that you shouldn't let a New Year's Eve pass by without evaluating, "What are my gourd trees?" For their sake I give myself without reservation unto the will of God for my life.

"But God prepared a worm..."<sup>28</sup>

Has he done that in your life? Let me pray.

*Dear loving Father, I pause for a moment to pray a special benediction upon what I have spoken and ask, Lord, that the sobriety of the message might touch the heart of the listener. And if there be somebody that is present this morning and they are wavering in your will in their life, oh God, deal tenderly and graciously with them, but lead them into the path of obedience to thee. And let them see afresh thy greatness, their nothingness and the value of souls to which you have given us a commission to reach and preach the truth. To that end may thy divine Holy Spirit live ungrieved within us, work unhindered through us until that precious moment when Christ comes for us? In his name I pray. Amen.*

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<sup>28</sup> Jonah 4:7