

April - June 2011

# The Link

**NORTH ROAD CHAPEL**

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**BIDEFORD**

# FORTY MOMENTOUS DAYS

*“And when He had spoken these things, while they beheld, He was taken up; and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven.”* (Acts 1:9-11)

*“But as the days of Noah were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, And knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.”* (Matthew 24:37-39)

The angels who were present at the Lord’s Ascension delivered to the disciples that wonderful message which is recorded in Acts chapter one. Though concise, it abounds with meaning and application, and can be described under three headings: **rebuke**, **comfort** and **warning**. Having already in the previous article dealt with the reproof implicit in their words, let the second aspect now be examined.

**2. Comfort** In the latter part of Acts 1:11 it is stated by the angelic messengers, *“this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven.”* Consider the experience of close friends who are parted from one another by circumstances. For example, childhood acquaintances who have known each other from earliest days, attended school together, shared many of the same interests, and consequently formed a deep friendship; but who become separated on account of the marriage, career or relocation of one of the pair. The individual left behind inevitably

begins to wonder, ‘shall I be forgotten?’ ‘Will this life-long friend keep in touch, or will their going away produce a gradual diminishing of their feeling and regard?’ These are emotions common to everyday life.

There are also associates of another category – the ‘fair-weather’ kind – who smile upon, and show much ‘friendship’ toward those who are enjoying prosperity and health; but who are conspicuously absent when adversity, poverty or sickness befalls. They are missing at those times when their company is most needed, and fall short of the old saying that, “a friend in need is a friend indeed”. To feel the chill of another’s forgetfulness or desertion is a very sad experience.

Could it be that such thoughts as these entered the minds of the disciples as they watched their Lord and Master ascend into Heaven? True, He had promised to be with them even unto the end; but would it be as the same loving, compassionate Saviour that they had known on earth? He was gone into the Glory; the heavens had received Him; He was henceforth sitting, glorified, at the right hand of the Majesty on High, all power in heaven and on earth being His. This was far removed from the lowly man of Galilee who had been so near to them over the years. Surely He would never be known to them again, as He had been during those happy and precious days of His earthly life.

Well might emotions of this nature have immediately flooded into the hearts of those eleven men who watched as the Lord disappeared into the clouds. Indeed, this fact may be inferred from the words of the angels, who stressed that “*this same Jesus*” will one day return. Christ Jesus is immutable, and so entirely changeless, that when He comes again, it will be the **same** Jesus. To His own will He manifest all the affection and love which He has ever held toward His chosen and redeemed ones. To the unbelieving world will He prove undiminished in holiness and righteous indignation as He summons the inhabitants of

the earth to judgment. For God “*hath appointed a day, in the which He will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom He hath ordained; whereof He hath given assurance unto all men, in that He hath raised Him from the dead*” (Acts 17:31). Yes – there is a day of universal judgment appointed, and it will be administered by **that Man** who was raised from the dead; that Man who appeared on ten or eleven occasions to His apostles after His resurrection; that same Jesus. Then shall the lower heavens pass away like a scroll (cf Isaiah 34:4); the earth will be burnt up (cf 2 Peter 3:12); but the Son of God remains unchanged through it all. He is the same yesterday, today and forever (cf Hebrews 13:8). This is the infallible testimony of Scripture.

In a world of change and uncertainty; when society is crumbling; while nations and governments totter and fall; when everything around gives evidence to the fact that there is no foundation for hope in any thing under the sun; what a consolation it is then to know that God’s people are eternally united with an unalterable Saviour! The **same** Jesus who dealt so kindly with the widow of Nain; who displayed such love and power in a time of bereavement at Bethany; who gave peace to the storm-tossed mariners in the gale upon Gennesaret; who wept over Jerusalem, wrestled in Gethsemane, and prayed for His very enemies from Calvary; this same Jesus still sits on the throne of heaven, and is ever touched with the “*the feeling of our infirmities*” (Hebrews 4:15).

“In every pang that rends the heart  
The Man of Sorrows had a part;  
He sympathises with our grief,  
And to the sufferer sends relief.” (Bruce)

Any fears of estrangement, or of being forgotten and neglected, which may have entered the minds of those eleven men as they saw their blessed Lord taken from them, were instantly allayed by the words of the angels.

However, not only were words of rebuke and comfort dispensed by the angelic attendants. There was also sounded a note of:

**3. Warning** “*this same Jesus... shall so come*” (Acts 1:11). The great event here announced is the Second Coming of Christ – a subject upon which there is a marked silence in these days. It is true that there has been much unbalanced and strange interpretation put upon various sections of Scripture, which has caused controversy and confusion. Wild speculation and predictions have been commonplace, not only among false cults, but sadly also among some who would claim to be sound and evangelical. This has brought the whole subject of the Second Advent into disrepute, and consequently, in many circles the topic gets scant attention, for fear of causing dissension. This is a sorry state of affairs, and is very wrong. The clarion note sounded by the angels must continue to be proclaimed today: this same Jesus **shall come!** This event is the continual burden of prophecy within the Word of God. Even before the days of Noah and the global flood: “*Enoch... the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these, saying, Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of His saints, To execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him*” (Jude 14). Asaph also fully expected it: “*Our God shall come, and shall not keep silence: a fire shall devour before Him, and it shall be very tempestuous round about Him. He shall call to the heavens from above, and to the earth, that He may judge His people*” (Psalm 50:3-4).

Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Joel, Habakkuk, indeed all the prophets to a greater or lesser extent, were Divinely inspired to deal with this vital matter. As the curtain fell upon the Old Testament scene, it was with the words of Malachi ringing with resounding clarity as he spoke of “*the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord*” (Malachi 4:5). In the closing chapter of that book, it is written: “*For,*

*behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the Lord of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch. But unto you that fear My name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in His wings”* (Malachi 4:1-2). The last ray which shines forth from the revelation of the Old Testament is the red glare of that final day, of Christ’s Second Advent.

Then as the New Testament begins the information and warnings given become even more distinct and emphatic. Repeatedly does the Lord speak of it Himself; its suddenness and fearful consequences He compares to the days of Noah and Lot. In those times they ate and drank, they bought and sold, they married and were given in marriage, and they knew not, nor paused to consider, until the judgment of God overtook them, and destroyed them all. *“Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed”* (Luke 17:30); it will be as dramatic as a bolt of lightning: *“For as the lightening cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be”* (Matthew 24:27).

Many of the Lord’s parables were spoken specifically to illustrate this dread happening. Matthew’s Gospel chapter 25 records the allegorical descriptions of the wise and foolish virgins at a wedding ceremony; of the servants entrusted with portions of their master’s money pending his return. That discourse concludes with the sublime and awesome scene of an assembled world, gathered before that Man whom God hath ordained, namely the man Christ Jesus; and He, sitting upon the throne of His glory, all the holy angels with Him, separating the ‘sheep’ on His right hand, from the ‘goats’, set on His left. *“Then shall the King say unto them on His right hand, Come, ye blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.” “Then shall He say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from Me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels”* (Matthew 25:34,

41). Little wonder the Lord said to His own: *“Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning; And ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their lord, when he will return... Blessed are those servants, whom the lord when he cometh shall find watching”* (Luke 12:35-37).

Again and again Christ warned of His Second Coming. Then on the slopes of Olivet, in departing from the disciples, He ordained that two angels should come at just that moment to reinforce His teaching on this very matter. In terse and unequivocal language they make a brief statement: ‘this same Jesus shall come’. He is to return to fulfil and carry out all that the prophets predicted, and all that He Himself so clearly stated.

Thus the apostles in their turn took up the same theme. Peter expounded the truth of the Gospel on the day of Pentecost, speaking of that time when the sun would be turned to darkness, and the moon into blood; that great and notable day of the Lord which was to come; then urged his hearers to call upon the name of the Lord, and be saved (cf Acts 2:20-21). Let every reader of these words heed the same warning! This same Jesus shall come! *“Be ye therefore ready also: for the Son of man cometh at an hour when ye think not”* (Luke 12:40).

The apostle Paul in the epistles is continually repeating the matter; alerting and entreating the people, and describing in graphic terms, *“the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ* (Titus 2:13). Similarly James exhorts his readers, *“stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh”* (James 5:8). Peter again, just before his death, devoted the closing chapters of his last epistle to this subject; *“the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be?”* (2 Peter 3:10-11). Finally John, appointed by

God to conclude the canon of Holy Writ, majors on this sublime yet sobering truth: “Behold, He cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see Him, and they also which pierced Him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of Him. Even so, Amen. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty” (Revelation 1:7-8).

These verses suffice to show the prominence of the Second Advent from the ante-diluvian days of Enoch, to the very last pages of the Bible. Scripture is impregnated with this inspirational theme: that Christ is to return in power and glory, to subdue all things to Himself. The timing of these events has **never** been revealed. Were it possible to make a chronological calculation, the event would cease to be what God intended it – namely, the great hope and awakener of the Church on earth in **all** periods of human history. This sure and certain event should stir every unsaved person to ‘prepare to meet their God’, and stimulate every Christian to service and holy living: “And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as He is pure” (1 John 3:3).

Almost the last words spoken by Christ upon earth were these: “It is **not** for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in His own power” (Acts 1:7). It is sufficient to know that ‘this same Jesus shall so come in like manner as He was seen to go into heaven’. This **same** Jesus: the one who, having loved His own, loved them to the end (cf John 13:1); having loved on earth, He continues to love from heaven, and this same Jesus will come to receive His own people unto Himself at last. They are His sheep; the ones to whom He has given eternal life. They are to inherit the Kingdom prepared for them from the foundation of the world (cf Matthew 25:34). This is the Church’s great goal; the triumphal end of her weary pilgrimage; the termination of her life militant, and the commencement of her life triumphant. Not surprising then, that the inspired Word calls it ‘the glorious hope’! It is this bright and wondrous prospect which so compensates for the



strugglings and trials and sorrows which are common to all God's children. In consideration of such a destiny, they can say with the apostle, "*I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us*" (Romans 8:18); and concur with the hymn-writer:

"With such a blessed hope in view,  
We would more holy be;  
More like our risen, glorious Lord,  
Whose face we soon shall see." (Boswell)

This same Jesus shall come – but what then of the 'goats'? "*When they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape*" (1 Thessalonians 5:3). For them, there is great cause for concern; the masses of humanity who have not, and will not come to Christ for salvation. What of them? Consider these solemn words: "*the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of His power*" (2 Thessalonians 1:7-9).

"Behold, He comes to one and all;  
Be ready when He comes!  
'Ere long we'll hear the trumpet call;  
Be ready when He comes!  
To judgment called at His command,  
From every clime, from every land.  
Before His throne we all must stand;  
Be ready when He comes!" (Hoffmann)

W. H. Molland  
(transcribed by R. J. Steward)

## “ THIS SAME JESUS ”

‘This same Jesus!’ Oh! how sweetly  
Fall those words upon the ear,  
Like a swell of far off music,  
In a nightwatch still and drear!

He who healed the hopeless leper,  
He who dried the widow’s tear;  
He who changed to health and  
gladness  
Helpless suffering, trembling fear;

He who wandered, poor and  
homeless,  
By the stormy Galilee;  
He who on the night-robed mountain  
Bent in prayer the wearied knee;

He who spake as none had spoken,  
Angel-wisdom far above,  
All-forgiving, ne’er upbraiding,  
Full of tenderness and love;

He who gently called the weary,  
‘Come and I will give you rest!’  
He who loved the little children,  
Took them in His arms and blessed;

He, the lonely Man of Sorrows,  
‘Neath our sin-curse bending low;  
By His faithless friends forsaken  
In the darkest hours of woe;

‘This same Jesus!’ When the  
vision  
Of that last and awful day  
Bursts upon the prostrate spirit,  
Like a midnight lightning ray;

When, else dimly apprehended,  
All its terrors seem revealed.  
Trumpet-knell and fiery heavens,  
And the books of doom unsealed;

Then, we lift our hearts adoring  
‘This same Jesus’, loved and  
known,  
Him, our own most gracious  
Saviour,  
Seated on the great white Throne;

He Himself, and ‘not another’,  
He for whom our heart-love  
yearned  
Through long years of twilight  
waiting,  
To His ransomed ones returned!

For this word, O Lord, we bless  
Thee,  
Bless our Master’s changeless  
name;  
Yesterday, to-day, for ever,  
Jesus Christ is still the Same.

F. R. Havergal (1836 – 1879)

## AN ANGELIC ADDRESS

The ascension of Christ and His return at the Parousia go together. And these heavenly messengers bring a glorious promise to the apostles at this great moment... “this Jesus, received up from you into heaven”, this very one who is known by this His personal name and described by the act just witnessed, He shall return... A moment ago the apostles spoke with this Jesus, now His glorious reception into the heavenly world is already accomplished. What this implied Jesus had Himself told them: not mere rest while they struggled here below, but a mighty, all-transcending exercise of power and authority. The angels have nothing to add to all that Jesus had told them on this subject; they restate another assurance which the Lord had left His apostles, restate it in the most emphatic and direct form: this Jesus “shall so come in what manner you viewed him going into heaven”. Note the emphatic words... “this Jesus”, “thus” “in the same way in which you viewed”, etc. He departed visibly, He shall return visibly; He went to heaven, He shall come from heaven; He went away bodily, He shall come back bodily... He will return in all His glory with all the angels of God about Him for the final judgment...

R. C. H. Lenski (1864 – 1936)

### **ANNUAL BIBLE CONVENTION**

**4<sup>th</sup> & 5<sup>th</sup> June 2011 D.V.**

Saturday 3.30 p.m. & 6.00 p.m. Tea served 5.00 p.m.

Lord's Day 10.45 a.m. & 6.30 p.m.

*Preacher* : Alun McNabb  
( Great Bridgeford )

*a cordial invitation is extended to all*

## OF WHOM SPEAKETH THE PROPHET?

*“Then Jonah prayed unto the Lord his God out of the fish’s belly, And said, I cried by reason of mine affliction unto the Lord, and He heard me; out of the belly of hell cried I, and Thou heardest my voice. For Thou hadst cast me into the deep, in the midst of the seas; and the floods compassed me about: all Thy billows and Thy waves passed over me. Then I said, I am cast out of Thy sight; yet I will look again toward Thy holy temple. The waters compassed me about, even to the soul: the depth closed me round about, the weeds were wrapped about my head. I went down to the bottoms of the mountains; the earth with her bars was about me for ever: yet hast Thou brought up my life from corruption, O Lord my God. When my soul fainted within me I remembered the Lord: and my prayer came in unto Thee, into Thine holy temple.”* (Jonah 2:1-7)

The Prophet Jonah, unwilling to obey the divine commission to preach to the Ninevites, sought to flee from his responsibilities and from the Lord, by taking ship in the very opposite direction. This was no sort of escape, for the judgments of God soon found him, in the form of a violent storm. Having identified Jonah as the cause of this meteorological phenomenon, the superstitious mariners hurled him overboard, whereupon the tumult instantly ceased. The prophet meanwhile fell into the watery depths, wherein God had sovereignly prepared a great fish to swallow him, and thereby preserve him alive. In this strange and horrible situation the wayward and disobedient prophet is depicted – no longer complaining or questioning His God – but praying. The fish’s belly became his prayer chamber, and was the unlikely location of the profound words recorded in Jonah chapter two.

Confronted with these amazing utterances, let that question be asked that was once posed by an Ethiopian Eunuch: *“of whom speaketh the prophet this? of himself, or of some other man?”* (Acts 8:34). These words

**do** refer to Jonah himself, for he was a historical figure, and this is an authentic account of the extraordinary events that befell him. Yet this experience of Jonah's signifies far more than appears on the surface. A commentator says: "Jonah prophesied of **Christ**, not so much in words, as by a suffering of his own: yet more openly than if he had proclaimed by speech His death and resurrection. For why was he received into the fish's belly, and given back after three days except to signify that Christ would, on the third day, return from the depths of Hell?"

Absolute confirmation of this is given by the Lord Himself in Matthew's gospel: "*For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth*" (Matthew 12:40). Jonah never prophesied by direct word of the sufferings, death and resurrection of Christ as did many of the other prophets. Nevertheless, by this terrible ordeal through which he passed, God has shed much light upon the work of the Mediator – such light as words could scarcely convey. God in His sovereignty, by His Holy Spirit gives as it were a dramatised production. Here, some of the detail of the awful experiences of the Lord Jesus in the penal aspect of His work of atonement is set forth; not by vocal expression, but in and by a living character.

It is the common belief, when the Lord said on the cross, "*Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit: and having said thus, He gave up the ghost*" (Luke 23:46), that immediately His spirit went to Heaven, whilst His body was taken down and laid in the grave; there to remain until it was raised on the third day. This is the prevalent interpretation. Presumably then, at the Lord's resurrection, His spirit came back in order that His personality as Mediator might be complete again, that at the appointed time He could ascend into Heaven as the man Christ Jesus. Meanwhile, the words of the Ancient Creed, "He

descended into Hell” are commonly denounced as being heretical and not in accordance with Holy Scripture.

It would be untrue to say that every doctrine expressed in ‘the Creeds’ and ‘Statements of Belief’ is correct. Although in the main, much of the content of those early writings is of great worth, being a bold affirmation of the ‘faith once delivered to the saints’. However, the remarks that follow are not based upon the Apostles’ Creed, the Athanasian Creed, or any other such document, but upon the infallible Word of God. These comments may be out of tune with the majority opinion of those who call themselves ‘evangelical’ or ‘reformed’. This is of no concern. I do not accept the teaching of the Lord’s spirit returning to Heaven at the point of His death on the cross. I contend for His descent into Hell.

Put simply: if Christ’s spirit went immediately to Heaven at His death, then He died the death of a saint – for this is what happens to the spirit of every Christian at death – their spirit is immediately in glory. But **Christ did not die the death of the saint. He died the death of the sinner.** He did not die the death of the justified believer – He died the death of the unjust transgressor. His was the death of the accursed. Where do the souls of the accursed go at death? To Heaven? Indeed they do not! They go to Hell. That is the teaching of Holy Scripture. Christ in His vicarious office, being the legal Surety for all His people, died the death of the sinner. For all His people’s sins were imputed to Him; He was charged with them all and so became officially guilty. The death of the Saviour was not just physical: He knew death in its **entirety**. He must taste this for every man for whom He stood Surety (cf Hebrews 2:9). Physical death, yes, but also spiritual and eternal death. This is what was involved in the Divine Sentence against the sinner: “*the soul that sinneth, it shall die*” (Ezekiel 18:4). Christ, standing in the sinner’s place at the bar of Divine Justice, died as a sinner, **not** as a saint. He was made sin (cf 2 Corinthians 5:21), He

was made a curse (cf Galatians 3:13). How could He taste of the Second Death (which was the Divine Sentence upon the sinner) if at death His soul went immediately to Heaven? No, it is clear “He descended into Hell”. “*He hath poured out His soul unto death*” (Isaiah 53:12) – this is not physical death; it is the pang of eternal death.

David, in prophetic language concerning Christ, wrote in the Psalms: “*For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption*” (Psalm 16:10). There are those who will immediately contradict and say that ‘Hell’ here means ‘the grave’. Such an explanation is nonsensical, for the **soul** never goes into the grave – only the **body**. The soul of the sinner is immediately in Hell at death; contrariwise the soul of the saint is instantly in Heaven. Christ Himself was absolutely clear on this point in the account of the Rich Man and Lazarus (cf Luke 16:19-31). Linguistically, the underlying Greek and Hebrew words translated “Hell” mean ‘the place of departed souls’. This cannot be interpreted as ‘the grave’, since the soul cannot be buried or laid in the ground.

Further confirmation of this comes in the Acts of the Apostles: “*Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by Him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know: Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain: Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that He should be holden of it. For David speaketh concerning Him, I foresaw the Lord always before my face, for He is on my right hand, that I should not be moved: Therefore did my heart rejoice, and my tongue was glad; moreover also my flesh shall rest in hope: Because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption*” (Acts 2:22-27). ‘Jesus of Nazareth’ is the one in focus – a man approved of God – there is no doubt about the subject of these words. He was delivered by the determinate counsel of God. Note the precise

details given: men took Him by wicked hands, and crucified Him. This Jesus actually and literally died. But remember – He died the death of the accursed. Him “*God hath raised up, having loosed the **pains of death***” (v. 24). What pain does a dead body suffer? None. What pain does a soul endure in Heaven? None. How then could it be said of Christ that He was loosed from the ‘pains of death’ if His spirit was in Heaven when He died and was buried? Verse 27 makes it as clear as words can possibly express: God did not leave the soul of the Redeemer in **Hell**. Neither did He suffer the body of His Holy One to see corruption in the grave. His flesh rested there in the tomb in hope as Scripture states. After three days and three nights of His mortal remains lying in the sepulchre, God raised Him from the dead, and brought His soul and spirit out of Hell. For in that realm, He had spoiled those principalities and powers, making a show of them openly (cf Colossians 2:15) and destroyed Him who had the power of death (cf Hebrews 2:14).

This theme might appear to be a long way removed from the second chapter of Jonah’s prophecy; but in fact this is the very meaning of those words. Go back again to those verses and see wherein the comparison lies. In the case of Jonah, it was God who had determined that he should be cast into the deep. The sailors who performed the deed were but the instruments of God’s wrath. By Jonah being cast into the sea, the others on board were saved, and the storm ceased. Comparing this with Acts 2:23, God **determined** the death of His Incarnate Son; the men who actually slew Him were merely the instruments; and through His death many are made righteous. The parallels cannot be denied. As this chapter is more closely examined, so is shown the error of modern teaching concerning the death, burial and resurrection of the Lord, and His location during the intervening three days and nights.



*“Thou hadst cast me into the deep... floods compassed me about: all Thy billows and Thy waves passed over me”*. These words were verily true of Jonah as he was cast into the sea, yet they have infinitely greater application to Christ, as God caused Him to be plunged into death and judgment. Scripture speaks prophetically concerning Him: *“Deep calleth unto deep at the noise of thy waterspouts: all thy waves and thy billows are gone over me”* (Psalm 42:7). *“The waters compassed me about, even to the soul: the depth closed me round about, the weeds were wrapped about my head”* (Jonah 2:5). The words pertaining to the two men are almost identical. Just as natural waves and billows swept over and engulfed Jonah, precisely so did the waves and billows of God’s wrath inundate the blessed Saviour.

The prophet further said: *“I am cast out of Thy sight”* (v. 4). Jonah realised that God’s judgment was upon Him **because** of his sin; He was now removed from God’s presence. This immediately connects with the words of Christ contained in Psalm 22:1, *“My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?”* – the plaintive cry of the Saviour when upon the cross (cf Matthew 27:46). Why did this unimaginable situation occur? Because Christ had become the Surety; His people’s sins were upon Him, He was charged with them, and He was made sin. God, being ‘of purer eyes than to behold evil’ (cf Habakkuk 1:13) withdrew from the Sin-bearer. The Lord was abandoned, because God is Holy. So like Jonah, Christ was cast out of sight – forsaken.

*“The waters compassed me about, even to the soul”* (v. 5). The sufferings of the Lord go far deeper than merely the physical aspects. Isaiah 53 states that He poured out His soul unto death, and speaks of the ‘travail of His soul’. This is spiritual in nature. The death of the soul means Hell, not Heaven. This is death in its entirety; the death that Christ died. Hence the travail and anguish of which the Scriptures speak. The same verse in Jonah also says *“the weeds were wrapped about my head”*. As the prophet plummeted into the raging sea, so was he entangled in the

swirling seaweed. There was nothing he could do – it was inevitable that such a thing would happen, for he was in that environment. What do ‘weeds’ imply in Scripture? They always denote the curse, the result of sin (cf Genesis 3:18). It was into this environment that the Saviour came in His great work of atonement. Then it was that all the sins of His people entwined around Him, as God laid on Him “*the iniquity of us all*” (Isaiah 53:6).

“*I went down to the bottoms of the mountains*” (v.6). Here are described caves and dark caverns – the abode of the lost. “*The earth with her bars was about me*”. A state of complete incarceration, shut in, in the darkness. “*He hath... brought me into darkness, but not into light*” (Lamentations 3:2) – all doors barred, and no possible escape. In the prophetic language of the Psalms, Christ says “*the sorrows of Hell compassed Me*” (Psalm 18:5). He knew full well that at death His spirit would not soar into Heaven, but rather must descend into Hell, and know the pain and horror of the second death. This is the meaning of His cry, “*Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit*” (Luke 23:46). The Lord knew that He was going into the realm of darkness. The weeds of sin were literally wrapped about Him; there was no escaping; the wrath of Divine Justice would be unleashed against Him; it was pangs of eternal death to which He was about to be exposed. So He prays – not that He might be saved from this hour – but rather, as His soul is about to be poured out in this aspect of death, He addresses His Father with the words “*into Thy hands I commend My spirit*”.

When Jonah’s soul fainted, then he prayed: “*When my soul fainted within me I remembered the Lord: and my prayer came in unto Thee*” (v. 7). Likewise also the Lord, as He hung upon the cross, knowing that within moments He would breathe His last, that the fires of Hell would engulf Him, and the powers of darkness bring all their destructive forces to bear, He turns to His Father and says, ‘I commend My spirit to Thy care’. ‘I am absolutely alone in this vast spiritual engagement;

My Holy soul is being poured out unto death; Father, I commit it to Thee'. This is the only consistent way in which to interpret these words.

Consider the conclusion of Jonah's dreadful experience. "*Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights*"; "*And the Lord spake unto the fish, and it vomited out Jonah upon the dry land*" (Jonah 1:17, 2:10). Jonah was not left in the sea; rather the fish swam to shore and deposited the prophet on dry ground, never again to experience the waves and billows. No longer were the weeds about him – they were left in the fish. The darkness and barred security of that beast was now past and gone forever. Jonah was safe on dry land. How reads the verse in Matthew's gospel? "*For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth*" (Matthew 12:40). In like manner Christ was brought forth again, never more to experience the billows of wrath, never more to be scorned by wicked men, or opposed by the Great Adversary. For in His engagement, He had triumphed gloriously. He was the Mighty Victor over sin and death and Hell. He was holding the keys of Death and Hell, on dry land indeed – on 'resurrection ground'. What is more, the weeds of His people's sin were forever gone, for He had "*put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself*" (Hebrews 9:26), and obtained eternal expiation and forgiveness.

This then is the teaching of Jonah chapter two. There was an actual and historical occurrence, in which a man experienced being swallowed by a fish for three days and three nights. But the spiritual significance of these words is an ocean of profundity and vital doctrine. May it be blessed to all who read.

W. H. Molland  
from a sermon preached 21<sup>st</sup> September 1995  
(transcribed by R. J. Steward)

## EDITORIAL

*“Wherefore he saith, When He ascended up on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men. Now that He ascended, what is it but that He also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that He might fill all things”* (Ephesians 4:8-10)

How can the Ascension rightly be described; or how can the magnitude of that amazing event be correctly measured? Writing by Divine inspiration, the Apostle Paul comes the closest to comprehending it, as he sets forth the two great extremes that are involved, namely: the depths **from** which Christ ascended, and the heights **to** which He ascended. It is when these vast opposites are considered together that the immensity and wonder of the Ascension truly comes to light.

The descent of the Saviour is seen in His **incarnation**, as He “...*made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men*” (Philippians 2:7). This was the beginning of His declension, for He was “*made **under** the law, to redeem them that were under the law*” (Galatians 4:4-5); not permitted to retain even the status afforded to the angelic host, being “*made a little **lower** than the angels for the suffering of death*” (Hebrews 2:9). Who can begin to tell the matchless condescension shown in this indescribable act? That God should be manifest in the flesh is indeed one of the great mysteries of godliness (cf 1 Timothy 3:16).

The Lord’s abasement continued in His **humiliation**, for, “*being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself*” (Philippians 2:8). Not for the man Christ Jesus a place of honour in this world, but rather the lot of the very lowest of humanity: poverty, weariness, oppression. He was

*“despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief”* (Isaiah 53:3); reproached on account of His home-town (cf John 1:46, 7:52), His occupation (Mark 6:3), His ministry (cf Luke 16:14), and the persons whom He interposed to save (cf Matthew 11:19). *“He was in the world, and the world was made by Him, and the world knew Him not. He came unto his own, and his own received him not”* (John 1:10-11); loving darkness rather than The Light, because of their inherent wickedness.

Still further did the Lord sink in His **death** – which was one of public execution, ignominy and shame. He was not granted a glorious or noble end, but instead the penalty charged upon the vilest of offenders. To that most horrible demise He willingly submitted, *“He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross”* (Philippians 2:8). Thus *“the scripture was fulfilled, which saith, And He was numbered with the transgressors”* (Mark 15:28); *“And He made His grave with the **wicked**”* (Isaiah 53:9). So it had to be! For He bore His people’s sins, and died as a sinner. The very manner of His death bore testimony to this great transaction: He was *“made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree”* (Galatians 3:13).

To imagine that this imputed guilt and its consequences ended with the Saviour’s parting breath is to omit altogether the spiritual aspect of His sufferings. It was essential to the work of penal substitution that the Lord Jesus suffer **every** aspect of the punishment that His people’s sins demanded, or else they could not hope to be delivered from it themselves. So His descent continued beyond the worst degradations of this world, to endure the ultimate extremity. He descended into Hell. Thus He cries unto God in the prophetic words of the Psalms: *“Thou hast laid Me in the lowest pit, in darkness, in the deeps. Thy wrath lieth hard upon Me, and Thou hast afflicted Me with all Thy waves... Thy fierce wrath goeth over Me; Thy terrors have cut Me off”* (Psalm 88:6-7, 16).

This is the truth of Scripture, set forth by type and prophecy in the Old Testament; and preached boldly by the Apostles in the New (cf Acts 2:22-36). The gross errors of Rome that have since subverted and marred this particular doctrine are rightly to be rejected and condemned; but let not the genuine teaching of God’s Word be lost in the process – for here is the full extent of Christ’s work of salvation seen – in all its breadth and length and depth and height.

“He Hell in Hell laid low;  
Made sin, He sin o’erthrew;  
Bowed to the grave, destroyed it so;  
And death, by dying, slew.” (Gandy)

The abasement which the Lord experienced, and the depths to which He had to go for His people’s redemption, are in no way contrary to His holiness, or detrimental to His divine honour. Rather do these sufferings magnify His greatness, and testify to His power. The Ascension appears all the more glorious and wonderful when the extremes to which the Saviour went are also held in view. The immortal Son of God, once made lower than the angels, rendered capable of dying, and having tasted death for all His elect, is now seen “*crowned with glory and honour*” (cf Hebrews 2:9). It is on account of the things that He suffered, and because of the manner in which He triumphed, that “*God also hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father*” (Philippians 2:9-11).

Let every believer in contemplation of the Lord’s Ascension reverently remember that “*He also descended first*”. The Saviour has endured the unfathomable depths of sin and the curse, in order that His people might share the incomprehensible heights of His glory.