

# A Basket of Figs

December, 2000

Dedicated to the idea that the decree makes the difference. Jeremiah 24:2,3

## The Second Time

And the word of the LORD came unto Jonah the second time. . . . (Jonah 3:1)

This is one of my favorite verses in the Bible.

Jonah had messed up. God had commanded him to go to Nineveh and warn them that in thirty days the city would be destroyed. This was an act of mercy on God's part, for often wrath comes without specific warning.

Jonah did not want to go. Nineveh was the enemy of Israel. The Assyrians were pagans, a major Mediterranean power threatening the very existence of Israel. Jonah knew that God was gracious and merciful. If Nineveh repented, God would forgive them, and that might not be good for Israel. Jonah would rather God just wiped them out. (Jonah 4:1-4)

So Jonah fled in the opposite direction. He took a ship to go to Tarshish (probably Spain). Every Sunday School child knows the story.

Unknown to him, Jonah became a figure of Jesus Christ. Jesus said He would be dead for three days just as Jonah was in the belly of the whale for "three days and three nights."

As the ship carrying Jonah put out to sea, God prepared a great storm that brought terror to the hearts of even the seasoned seamen. They called on Jonah to pray. He knew the cause of the storm, however, and persuaded them to cast him overboard, and he was swallowed by a whale, also prepared of God.

Jonah thought he was dead and in hell (Jonah 2:2). But he did the best he could, tried

to guess which direction Jerusalem was, and cried out to God. He thanked God for His mercies, renewed his vows, and gave God glory for salvation (Jonah 2:7-9). Then God spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah out upon the dry land.

What a sight he must have been. Seaweed was wrapped about his head (Jonah 2:5) and the stench must have been awful.

Some of the greatest pearls in the Bible are found in the messiest scenes. “The word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time.”

It would have been normal for Jonah to have thought that it was all over with him. Even though God had spared his life, Jonah would have been justified in thinking that his work as a prophet of God was finished. He had been unfaithful. He had disobeyed the commandments of God. He had fled from his duty. But God was not finished with Jonah yet, and sent His word the second time.

**This is a great text for the new year.** There is a companion text in Lamentations 3:21-26

- 21 This I recall to my mind, therefore have I hope.
- 22 *It is of the LORD'S mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not.*
- 23 *They are new every morning; great is thy faithfulness.*
- 24 The LORD *is* my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in him.
- 25 The LORD *is* good unto them that wait for him, to the soul *that* seeketh him.
- 26 *It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the LORD.*

Jeremiah had also seen great trouble and distress. The city of Jerusalem had been destroyed by Babylon. The temple had been destroyed and the flower of Israel had been slain or carried captive. The houses had been looted and given to the fires. The maidens had been carried away. Bodies were everywhere and fires burned in the rubble.

The only comfort Jeremiah could find was in the nature of God. He knew that God is merciful and good, even in the midst of terror and wrath. Every morning is new; every morning is a new opportunity for repentance and rebirth.

This shows us one of the reasons why God ordered the world the way He did. Even in the cycle of the seasons and of the days and nights, God is showing us the way, showing us His nature.

God gives us many opportunities of new starts and new ways. Every day is a new day and a new opportunity. The past does not define our opportunities; the nature of God does.

**I believe in New Years Resolutions.** I believe that there is hope for men if they hope in God. Jeremiah recalled the nature of God, and that gave him hope. It was bad in Jerusalem; it was bad for those who had been carried captive.

But there is always hope for the living. What is that hope? It is that we are not consumed (Lamentations 3:22). Israel was not utterly consumed, by the mercy of the Lord, and there was the promise that she would rise again. Jonah was in the belly of the whale and might think he was in hell, but he wasn't in hell yet.

Every man walking the earth should reason thus: "I am not in hell today; therefore I can have hope."

Jonah called on the Lord from the belly of the whale and Jeremiah called upon the Lord from the ruins of Jerusalem. Both found hope in God, in the nature of God.

**Man's hope does not lie in positive thinking or in searing the conscience.** God is the portion of the soul of the godly and that is the ground of hope. [Lam. 3:24] This means that the soul longs to feast upon God and can be satisfied no other way. God is the Bread of Life, and came down from Heaven to give life to the soul. [John 6] As long as we live and move and are not in hell, there is hope for us, if we will seek our hope in Christ.

We confess in the Apostles Creed: "I believe in the forgiveness of sin." What a wonderful thing is forgiveness. Jonah had difficulty accepting forgiveness of sins and the postponing of judgment for the men of Nineveh. The second start that he would deny them was the very thing God provided for him.

"The word of the Lord came the second time," to Jonah, so that he might go and an-

nounce a second start for the men of Nineveh.

Many years ago I heard a story about a little girl who was sent to the grocery store by her mother to buy a bottle of milk. Older readers will remember when milk came in glass bottles with a paper cap.

After buying the milk, the little girl was standing on the corner, waiting to cross the street. While she was standing there, the milk bottle slipped from her small hands, and broke upon the sidewalk, splashing milk on her feet and on the feet of those standing near. She burst into tears.

“Well,” said a severe-looking woman. “I guess your mother won’t send you to the store anymore.”

The little girl looked up, her eyes flashing and her tears drying up. “Yes, she will, too,” she exclaimed. “My mother always gives me another chance!”

So it is with the Lord. Psalm 103:8-13 “The LORD *is* merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy. He will not always chide; neither will he keep *his anger* for ever. He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. For as the heaven is high above the earth, *so* great is his mercy toward them that fear him. As far as the east is from the west, *so* far hath he removed our transgressions from us. Like as a father pitieth *his* children, *so* the LORD pitieth them that fear him.

What a great message for the New Year: “The word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time.”

## **Just Beautiful!**

The photograph came in the mail with a Christmas card a few years ago. It showed a beautiful little girl of about four and on the back was written her name and short sentence, “I cannot imagine not having her!”

What memories it brought back! Most vivid was the one of a young girl, barely out

of her teens, in the fetal position on the floor of her apartment, sobbing her heart out.

Four people kept the vigil almost all night: my wife, a young man, the young girl on the floor, and myself. The girl was a Christian from a very conservative congregation of a very conservative denomination. She dreaded telling her parents the news, fearful that it would crush them. She was not married, and pregnant. The father of the baby was the young man, newly come to Colorado Springs. He was uncomfortable, embarrassed, miserable.

Abortion seemed to be the only way out, she thought. She had made an appointment with an abortionist for the next morning at 9:00. She knew what her parents and church thought about unwed parents and about abortion. But this way, she thought, they might never know, for they were in one of the frozen states of the north and she far away in Colorado Springs. Only she and the young man needed to know.

The young man had called us the night before, telling us the whole story. He had enough understanding of right and wrong to cringe at the prospect of abortion. Could we do something? I didn't know, but was willing to do what I could. So my wife and I went over, and found them as described.

What to do? We searched our minds. We prayed. We pled with her to get on the phone, call her parents, promise us not to get the abortion. For long minutes she just lay there sobbing. The night dragged on and on.

"If I kept the baby, would I have to marry him?" she asked. I replied that in the Old Testament that would be the decision of her father, but the conception of a child out of wedlock is not in itself a good reason for marriage. She insisted that she did not love him, and would not marry him.

"I could never face my parents," she sobbed. She loved her parents; she respected and agreed with their faith. She hated the very idea of bringing shame and disappointment to them. My wife said, "But wouldn't they hate the idea of an abortion more than an unmarried pregnancy?"

"Yes," she said. "But they wouldn't have to know." She returned to this theme again and again.

The long hours passed. More prayer, more Bible reading, more sobbing and tears. As the time wore on it became clear that confrontation with her parents was the major issue. We realized what had to be done.

Calling out to God from the depth of my heart, I said something like this, “\_\_\_\_\_ [using her name]. Your parents are going to know, because I am going to tell them. In a few minutes I am going to go home, pick up the phone, and tell them that you are pregnant and that you have an appointment with an abortionist tomorrow morning at 9:00 o’clock. So whether or not your parents know is no longer an issue. If you have the baby or if you don’t, they are going to know, because I will tell them.” I knew it smacked of blackmail, but I didn’t care. The very life of her baby was at stake.

But I never had to make that call. In a few minutes, she stopped sobbing, got to her feet, looked me in the eye, and said that she would call. She would call her parents and not keep the appointment in the morning. I knew that her word was good. It was then almost dawn, we had a time of prayer, and the three of us went home, thanking God for a wonderful victory of grace.

She did not abort her baby. She did not marry the young man. He soon left Colorado Springs, and dropped out of our lives. She returned to her parents’ house to have her baby.

About four years later the picture came. “I cannot imagine not having her.” She was still not married; that would come later, we would learn, and other children would follow.

But to my wife and I there is only one, that beautiful little girl in the photograph. Some battles are worth fighting. Some vigils are worth the labor. She must be about thirteen years old now, and we have never met. That will come in heaven. To God be the glory. This preacher has failed many times. It was really nice to win one.

# Paul's Gospel, or Hell

I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. . . . But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught *it*, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ. –Gal 1:6-8, 11-12

We have three logical choices. Paul was a liar; Paul was deceived; Paul spoke the truth. There are consequences for each of these positions, logical consequences. For two thousand years the church has held the third, that Paul spoke the truth.

To hold to the first two propositions is to believe in the Mother of all Conspiracies. A man would have to believe that the apostles and the early church conspired to foist upon the world the adulterating teachings of Paul. Not only this, they were so brilliant that they pulled off the greatest hoax in the history of the world. Jesus' Gospel was simple and pure, but Paul messed it all up, as they try to convince us.

It takes a certain arrogance to believe this, a sort of condescending, superior attitude. Those who believe in conspiratorial theories always have this attitude. They read the same papers, listen to the same radio, hear the same things, but they are smart enough to read between the lines and see the real message that the masses miss.

People can believe such if they want to, but they are forced to a miserable view of history. Even Rome, from which so much deception and fraud has come, has always held to the authority of the Pauline writings. So have the Orthodox and the Protestant churches.

Paul is unambiguous. His gospel came from heaven, revealed by God, by the revelation of Jesus Christ. He pronounces a curse upon anyone who preached something different. The church is called to evaluate, to decide, to reject those who preach another gospel.

Paul's gospel is the same gospel as that preached by the other apostles, and that which was preached by Jesus Christ Himself. It is the gospel of the forgiveness of sins through the blood of Jesus Christ. It is the gospel of justification by faith, without works, given freely by God through Jesus Christ.

A man either goes to heaven by means of this gospel, or he does not go to heaven at all. There is salvation in no other name but by the name of Jesus. All else is deception and vanity.

## This and That

I John 4:3 **“Every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that *spirit* of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world”** Do words mean anything? Is contradiction of the words of God the mark of the Antichrist? Books about the Antichrist make the best seller lists, but they are often diversionary. The real mark of Antichrist is carried in the forehead and in the hand of unbelievers. In denying Christ in mind and deed accomplish the work of the devil. What do the words mean? Is the Holy Spirit saying something meaningful here, or can I make it mean anything I want?

The humanist only knows the things of the world. When Jeremiah warns of judgment upon Jerusalem, his enemies accuse him of being in collaboration with the enemy. They can only see the world of time and space. A message from God is incomprehensible to them.

We will send *A Basket of Figs* free of charge to anyone who requests it. We will be glad to send it to your friends and relatives. It is our desire that these little papers be used of the Lord to bear witness of the truth as it is in Christ. Our only request is that they be read: you do not even have to agree with everything! Unless otherwise indicated, all articles are written by Pastor Powell, and they may be freely duplicated as long as duly credited. We do not solicit funds, nor will we give or sell our mailing list to anyone.

All readers of this publication are invited to visit our website: [www.tcrc.faithweb.com](http://www.tcrc.faithweb.com).

### Trinity Covenant Church

Location: Citadel Christian Center  
3704 E. Uintah., Colorado Springs.  
Mail: 6050 Del Paz Dr.,  
Colo. Spgs. CO 80918  
Phone: 719-590-1477  
Worship: 2:30 p.m.

### You Are Invited

Trinity Covenant invites you to attend our worship services. If you desire a church that uses the Apostles' Creed and the *Heidelberg Catechism*, emphasizes family worship and responsibility, then Trinity Covenant may be for you.

Pastor: C. W. Powell