

THE DEATH OF DEATH

Matthew 12:39 But he answered and said unto them, An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas:

Matthew 12:40 For as Jonas 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.

As we contemplate the death of our Lord Jesus Christ at this time of the year, I wish to focus on the sign of Jonah, which Jesus said pointed to his own death. So, in what way does Jonah's story point to the Lord's death? Let us begin with Jonah asleep in the ship. The sea raged and threatened to kill the mariners and passengers aboard if Jonah was not cast overboard. 'Then said they unto him, What shall we do unto thee, that the sea may be calm unto us? for the sea wrought, and was tempestuous' (Jonah 1:11). They tried to lighten the weight of the ship by casting precious belongings overboard with no success. The sea became God's instrument of death – it actually became death. ***God was determined that Jonah's will and attitude must die in the depths of the sea.*** 600 000 souls in Nineveh were waiting for Jonah to preach repentance to them. The 'death' of Jonah foreshadowed the death of God manifested in flesh – Jesus Christ. There is a death that ends all deaths. Jonah was about to experience the death that saves. There is a parallel years later with the Lord Jesus Christ. He too was asleep in a boat on the Sea of Galilee. The difference, however, was that he was not in conflict with his own will to die for the sins of the world, so when his terrified disciples woke him up, he calmly rebuked the sea which fell silent. The lesson for us here is to ask whether we are in the good, acceptable and perfect will of God.

Now once Jonah was thrown overboard reluctantly, there was sadness among the good folk in the ship who were certain that Jonah was dead. They could not be more wrong: God prepared a great fish says the Bible (Jonah 1: 17). Several feet beneath the ship, prayers were being made to the throne of God from the fish's belly. Similarly, there were people, like Pilate, who did not want Jesus to die. Many, such as his disciples, family and friends, were deeply sorrowful to see him hanged. On the Road the Emmaus, the dejected disciples said, 'But we trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel: and beside all this, to day is the third day since these things were done' (Luke 24:21). But none of them could imagine that Christ had descended below to set the captives free.

Ephesians 4:8 *Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men.*

Ephesians 4:9 *(Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth?)*

Ephesians 4:10 *He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things.)*

The ‘lower parts of the earth’ is the realm of the dead. This is the place that the souls of the dead righteous went to rest awaiting the mighty visitation of Jesus Christ. This was ‘sheol’ or ‘hades’ of which David said, ‘his soul was not left in hell’ (hades or the lower regions) (Acts 2:31). Abraham, Joshua, Ruth, Daniel and all the righteous souls of the OT were waiting for that day when Jesus would descend from the Cross and preach the Gospel to them. Peter states:

1Peter 3:18 *For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit:*

1Peter 3:19 *By which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison;*

Clearly, the OT saints, however great they were, could not ascend to heaven without the Lord declaring the Gospel to them. Similarly, there was no way Jonah could prosper in his journey in the ship without first declaring salvation to Nineveh. This is what Paul was referring to when he stated: ‘God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect’ (Hebrews 11:40).

Once we understand the above, the mystery of baptism is unveiled. The sea represents death and rages for souls to die in its watery grave. The world is divided into two categories: those who hear the Gospel and willingly die to themselves in baptism in Jesus name (Acts 2:38) and those who refuse and will be thrown into the Lake of fire. Baptism kills the body of adamic sin, our wills and attitudes that are contrary to Christ’s will. Now listen carefully: ***the sign of Jonah is Jesus’ warning to his generation about baptism.*** Jonah was cast into the sea – water.

Micah 7:19 *He will turn again, he will have compassion upon us; he will subdue our iniquities; and thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea.*

Notice what Jesus said: ‘Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me’ (Matthew 16:24). The cross represents the condemnation of sin. Once you carry it and follow Jesus, you will end up experiencing the death that saves. Baptism is the death of death.