

A series for Home Worship in January 2022 by Alan Misson Sunday 2nd January

Gold

Suggested Readings: Matthew 2:7-12; Exodus 25:10-16, 23-30; Revelation 3:14-22, Psalm 21:1-3

“Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh.”

The account of the wise men coming to Jesus presents us with a wonderful picture of the sort of gifts we can bring to the Lord, but as with the wise men, the first or most important gift we can present is gold. As we can gather from our readings, gold is mentioned frequently in the Bible and most extensively in the description of the furnishings of the Tabernacle which the Children of Israel took with them through the wilderness from Egypt to the Promised Land. In the New Testament only Matthew mentions gold in the gospels but it appears in most of the epistles. But it is in the final book of the Bible, Revelation, that gold features strongly once more ending with the account of the Holy City New Jerusalem with the streets of the city of pure gold, transparent as glass.

Gold, as we all know, is a symbol of love. We use it as a symbol of our love for one another and in the Bible it is a wonderful symbol of God's love for us and how we should love God in return. But, we might ask ourselves, why is gold the symbol of love and not some other material?

Gold lasts and lasts for thousands of years without changing. A good image perhaps of God's love for us which lasts and does not change. And also a lesson for us in how our love for others should be!

Gold is a relatively soft metal and it feels warm to the touch. It wouldn't be very nice if a gold ring on the finger always felt cold! And love is certainly not hard and cold, it is soft and warm, just like gold.

Gold does not oxidise and rust. It maintains its golden look with the minimal of cleaning. God's love for us is just like that. It is pure and clean and cannot be tarnished unlike our love for others which doesn't always live up to this ideal.

Gold can be melted and made into new shapes and it can be hammered very thin so that it can cover an object and make it bright and golden. Love is not fixed. Like gold, it can take on many forms from the caring hug to a word of reproach to someone we love. And in any situation even a very little love can cover over the problems being faced and bring brightness and warmth.

Gold is mined from the ground, often very deep down. But it can also be washed out of the ground and carried along in streams and rivers to be collected by careful sieving of the river bed. Deep down within us is the love which is the Lord's life within us. We need to get in touch with that source of life and love and bring it to the surface so that we can use it in serving the needs of others. And maybe we should see in the panning for gold in streams and rivers the way in which true ideas flowing through our minds can bring love and goodness within our grasp.

Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, at the start of this New Year, when my thoughts turn again to new beginnings and starting afresh, be with me as I gaze into the distance of hopes and dreams and opportunities for service, and the challenges and uncertainties that the unknown future may bring.

Take my fears and turn them into strengths.

Take my lack of faith and empower me through your Spirit which breathes life into this world and whose presence is reflected in the icy chill of winter's breath as well as the comforting warmth of a summer breeze.

Hold my hand and walk with me into this New Year so that I can follow you more closely and more fully.

And help me Lord to seek, at whatever cost, the love that only you can give me. May I “*buy gold refined by fire*”, and in doing so become truly enriched by your wonderful goodness.

A series for Home Worship in January 2022 by Alan Misson Sunday 9th January

Jesus goes to Egypt

Suggested Readings: Matthew 2:13-23; Genesis 12:1-20; Arcana Caelestia 1401,1402; 3305:4

“Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt”

Joseph is instructed by an angel to take Mary and Jesus down to Egypt for their safety – but why Egypt? Egypt was of course where the children of Israel had become slaves until Moses was able to lead them out and onwards to the promised land. But by about 300BC there were many settlements of Jews back in Egypt particularly around what we now call Alexandria. So Joseph could find a safe place to stay in Egypt despite the very long journey needed to get there. Not only was Jesus fulfilling prophecy by going to Egypt but he was also following the pattern established by Abram.

Spiritually speaking Egypt in the Word stands for all the facts and figures and ideas we can learn about the world around us and at a somewhat higher level all the facts and figures and ideas we can learn about moral and spiritual ways of living for example by reading and learning from the Bible. So there is a phase in all our lives when we go down to Egypt and immerse ourselves in the knowledge the world has to offer.

It is wonderful to observe the start of this process in tiny babies who gradually become aware of the world outside their mother's womb. Slowly but surely they open their eyes and their ears and make small intended movements of their outer limbs. This leads on to the start of touching and playing, then sitting and finally walking – then the real exploration commences. This phase of collecting knowledge carries through home life and school on to adolescence, hopefully extending beyond the things of the world to the things of religion.

In the Genesis account Abram went down to Egypt when there was a famine in his land. This pictures the state of Jesus as a tiny child having no knowledge at all – and as a result needing to start the process of learning at a natural level about the world he had entered – he needed to go down to Egypt.

Once we have been immersed in the things of the world we tend to find particular interests and we may explore these to great depth as we grow in years. Of course all the knowledge we acquire of the way the world works is essential for us as we make our way in the world but it is intended only as a starting point and foundation for the greater and more important development of our spiritual lives.

But we can become stuck at the external level meant by Egypt, and not just stuck, we can become slaves to the external world and its facts and figures just as the descendants of Abram became slaves in Egypt before the Lord, through Moses, was able to lead them out of bondage.

Jesus remains in Egypt only a short time before returning to home in Nazareth. How short we don't really know but perhaps a year or so. But it is a symbolically short period because, although outwardly Jesus is the same as any other boy, inwardly he is very different and his need to dwell in the facts, figures and ideas of the external world is short-lived.

Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, I thank you for all the facts, figures and knowledge I can gain about the wonderful world you have created around me. Thank you that I am able to use this knowledge to live my daily physical life. But Lord I acknowledge that sometimes I have become stuck and enslaved by the things of the world and have left no time to explore the deeper spiritual side of life. Help me to get the balance right - to see my knowledge of the world only as the starting point – that it needs to be followed by a fuller and deeper exploration of the spiritual dimension of life with you, Lord, as my only guide.

A series for Home Worship in January 2022 by Alan Misson Sunday 16th January

New wine is for fresh wineskins

Suggested Readings: Psalm 119:81-83; Mark 2:18-22; Joshua 9; True Christian Religion 784:1

"And no one puts new wine into old wineskins. If he does, the wine will burst the skins - and the wine is destroyed, and so are the skins. But new wine is for fresh wineskins."

In ancient times 'bottles' were made of animal skins - sheep, goat, or ox and the skins came in various sizes - an ox skin could hold as much as 60 gallons! But there were two main problems – drying and bacteria. After a time, an animal skin became brittle and ruptured easily, whereas a new skin had the capacity and resiliency to stretch. And the fermenting process triggered by contamination with bacteria would cause the skin to expand. New wine put into an old skin would ferment, expand, and burst them open. New skins, however, were strong enough to stretch without bursting. But there was a process for renewal. Old wineskins could be soaked under running water and rinsed of bitterness; their suppleness and resiliency would then be restored.

Psalm 119 tells us: *For I have become like a wineskin in the smoke, yet I have not forgotten your statutes.*

The Psalmist here is referring to an experience in his life where he sees himself on the brink of ruin. He uses the term "*wineskin in the smoke*" as an illustration of how he felt. Skin bottles were often used out in the wilderness and were hung in a tent when the use of fire was needed inside. The skin would absorb the smoke for a long period of time and become hard and shrivelled and afterwards it turned black and was useless.

But how does *new wine is for fresh wineskins* apply in our personal lives? The wineskin is an external container and can picture all our knowledge, our approach to life, the structure of our thinking – our way of doing things. The wine, as in the Holy Supper, can picture the truth, the true ideas, we can receive from the Lord. Have we got a worn out cracked and diseased ridden way of thinking about life? How is that going to hold new true ideas without bursting apart. Or have we built with the Lord's help a new approach to our external everyday life that can easily hold the truth he reveals to us? Have we left our wineskin in the smoke – in other words has our approach to life been badly tainted by false ideas rising up from the heat of selfish love?

The passage from True Christian Religion 784:1 includes the words: *As much as the new heaven grows, the New Jerusalem, meaning a new religion, comes down from it. This cannot happen in a moment. But it does happen as the false beliefs of the previous religion are banished. . . . This is why the Lord said: "Neither is new wine put into old wineskins. If it is, the skins burst and the wine is spilled and the skins are destroyed. But new wine is put into fresh wineskins, and so both are preserved."*

I am going to add very little further except to raise the question that we ought to ask ourselves both as individuals and as a church – Have we attempted to put new wine into old wineskins? Or will we take the opportunity this new year to seek to put new wine into fresh wineskins?

Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, I acknowledge that so often what I feel and what I love is dominated by my own needs and my own wants - and what I think and what I believe is dictated by my own ideas and my own convictions. I know Lord that if I remain wrapped up in my own needs and ideas I will be cold and dark and wintry inside and ultimately spiritually dead. Lord help me to break free from the bonds of self-interest and to recognise the power of your goodness and truth to transform my life so that my focus becomes the needs and ideas of others and not myself.

And Lord, when you cause me to change for the better, remind me that, of myself, I can do nothing good and true, and that really it is your life in me that is working for the benefit of others.

A series for Home Worship in January 2022 by Alan Misson Sunday 23rd January

Feelings and Thoughts

Suggested Readings: John 1:1-18; Arcana Caelestia 5302:1; Divine Love and Wisdom 33; AC 4464

This service is composed of five reflections related to our feelings and thoughts.

Reflection 1 We are essentially spiritual beings

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, a French philosopher and Jesuit priest, wrote the following: *We are not human beings having a spiritual experience; we are spiritual beings having a human experience.* Emanuel Swedenborg described the same concept somewhat differently: *As regards the soul, which - it is said - goes on living after death, it is nothing else than the actual person living in the body.* AC 6054

Reflection 2 We are human because of what we receive and accept from God

The opening of John's gospel shows us that the source of all life and light, or love and wisdom, is in God alone and that we ought to become increasingly better receivers of that life and light. In AC5302:1 Swedenborg writes: *But a human being is not a human being for any of these reasons [having a face, speaking, thinking] but because he has the capacity to think what is true and to will what is good; and when he thinks what is true and wills what is good he has the capacity to behold what is Divine and, perceiving what it is, to accept it.*

Reflection 3 Our will and understanding form our mind

For many the mind is considered to be something associated with neural activity in the brain. And yet spiritually minded people see the mind as essentially spiritual in nature linked to the brain and body in some way but not part of it. Without Divine Revelation on this subject we would not be able to perceive what the mind really is. So let's try to take on board the following extract from True Christianity 397: *There are two faculties that constitute our life. One is called the will, the other the understanding. They are distinct from each other, yet they were created to be one. When they are one, they are called "the mind."*

Reflection 4 Feelings and thoughts fill our mind

The word **will** that I have been using encompasses that part of us that desires, loves, intends, directs, wishes, resolves, cares, and as such it is like a vessel full of feelings. And the word **understanding** that I have been using encompasses that part of us that considers, perceives, thinks, recognises, realises, knows, contemplates, and as such it is like a vessel full of thoughts. So it is, that feelings and thoughts fill our mind.

Reflection 5 Feelings and thoughts survive death

Whether we refer to our mind or our spirit New Church Teachings make it clear that it is that part of us that survives death when our physical body can no longer work in correspondence to our inner spiritual being. And since our mind or spirit is essential composed of all our feelings and thoughts it is those feelings and thoughts that survive death and make us who we are in the spiritual world. Our feelings and thoughts will inevitably be a mixed up collection because we are very mixed up people but nevertheless the key issue is what our core or ruling love, that drives our feelings and thoughts, is really like. Is it predominantly a self-focussed love or is it predominantly a love focussed on the needs of others? Where is the balance?

Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, my God and Saviour, for too long I have wanted to be in control, for too long I have tried to be in control and for too long I have cherished the illusion that I am in control. And so often my feelings and thoughts have been centred on control in all its forms. Help me Lord to surrender my need for control into your hands and accept the truth that really you are always in control, leading, guiding, and directing me in the path you want me to follow.

Open my eyes so that I can see that following you in freedom is all the control in life that I need.

A series for Home Worship in January 2022 by Alan Misson Sunday 30th January

Beds

Suggested Readings: Psalm 139:8; Genesis 48:1-4, 49:29-30,33; Deuteronomy 3:1-3,11;
Mark 2:8-12; John 5:1-9

1st Reflection

What sort of mattress and bed do you like to sleep on? Do you like it so soft you can sink into it or orthopedically so hard that it is like sleeping on a board? If you are away from home do you sleep easily in a different bed or do you long to get back home to the bed you are used to? Our readings show us that beds in all sorts of forms occur throughout the Bible. In Genesis 28 a bed is not mentioned but Jacob sleeps on a stone at Bethel. Later in chapters 48 and 49 we find him in his bed as his life draws to a close.

Deuteronomy introduces us to Og, King of Bashan, and his bed of iron. Most of us have slept at one time or another on a metal bedstead with a mesh of springs to support a mattress on top. I certainly grew up sleeping on such a bed. Was Og's bed like the ones we know and remember or was it a completely solid structure made of iron bars? We don't know, but the image created is one of a solid inflexible bed, which, however beautifully ornamented it might have been, would nevertheless have been as hard as stone.

Both Gospel readings involve beds or mattresses of some sort and the Greek word translated as bed is *krabattos* – meaning a bed, pallet, or mattress for the poor. But we could add stretcher – since a wood and cloth stretcher would have been perfect to lower the sick man through the roof and down to Jesus.

2nd Reflection

The two miracles in Mark and John have in common that Jesus says to the man involved “*Take up your bed and walk*”. But they take place in two very different locations, Jerusalem and Galilee, and in one Jesus comes to the sick man and in the other the sick man comes to Jesus. A bed is something we lie on and rest in. It is what we get up from to start the day and what we return to at the end of the day. We spend around a third of our lives in bed. And the framework of your bed supports you near the ground and enables you to have the rest your body needs to recover and renew itself for the next day. With these thoughts in reflect on these quotations from the Writings on the correspondence of beds:

A 'bed' signifies doctrine, for as the body rests in its bed, so does the mind rest in its doctrine.
Apocalypse Revealed 137

The fact that 'bed' means religious teachings is clear from places in the Word where a bed is mentioned, and also from representatives in the next life. When a bed is seen there and someone is lying on it, the teachings on which that person relies are meant. Arcana Caelestia 10360

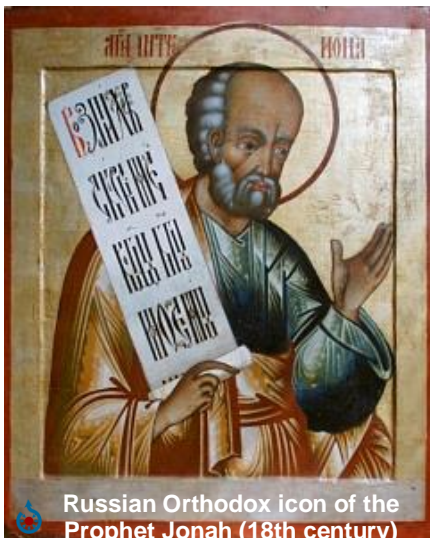
The doctrines or bodies of religious teachings we learn and take on board in our minds provide a framework on which we can rely and which can support us in daily living. But we cannot and we must not stay in bed all day! However interesting and thought provoking the teachings we rely on may be they are there to be used! We must take up our bed and walk because walking is all about living and our teachings are there to be lived out in daily life. Of course, we need to regularly return to our teachings, to reflect on them and how they should be applied – in this way spiritual recovery and renewal can begin to take place. But those teachings must be picked up and used if they are to have any value at all.

Words from a prayerful hymn [it can be sung to the tune for ‘*We plough the fields and scatter*’]

I thank you Lord and Saviour for showing me just how, your truth exists to re-direct my life right here and now. Give me the love and power I need to make a start; help put your loving teachings within a brand new heart.

Jesus' love can heal me his words are more than talk, so I must live the life he wants, take up my bed and walk.

How easy do we find it to live the Christian life? How much time do we set aside for prayer or the study of the Word? We live such busy lives, we do not seem to have sufficient time to do everything we ought to do. And then when the time or the opportunity does come to put our faith into practice, do we find that we sometimes fall short? Do we always live a life of love towards our neighbour? How true are these words of the Book of Common Prayer (1662)? *We have left undone those things which we ought to have done; And we have done those things which we ought not to have done.* Many of the people in the Old Testament have similar flaws to us and it can be a source of reassurance that just as the Lord loved them, despite all their faults, he loves us. The Lord can still use us for his purpose and forgives us when we fail. With this in mind, the readings and reflections for this month centre on the story of one such person, Jonah.



Sunday 5 February

The entire book of Jonah is only four chapters in length and we will look at each of these chapters in turn. So let us begin by reading **Jonah, Chapter 1**.

There is much in the character of Jonah with which we could identify. As soon as he has to put his faith into practice and do something useful, he makes excuses and runs away. He is asked to go to Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, to preach against it and warn it of its impending destruction. However, Jonah goes in totally the opposite direction towards Tarshish; there is still conjecture as to where Tarshish was, but all of the suggested locations are far away from Nineveh, requiring a journey west along the Mediterranean Sea.

Are there times when we too fail to carry the truths of religion into our everyday life? One of the most memorable sayings of

Swedenborg is “*All religion has relation to life and the life of religion is to do good.*” ([Doctrine of Life, 1](#)) There will be many times when we do this, but equally there will be occasions when we struggle to be charitable. Rather than doing the right thing, we will make up some excuse why we cannot. At those times, we are acting exactly like Jonah, yet we can learn from this story. Jonah realised that he was the reason for the rough seas ([Jonah 1:12](#)); he acknowledged that he had done wrong and the problems he was facing were of his own making. The message for us today is that if we accept our mistakes and place our trust in the Lord, He will protect us. Even though we have tried to desert Him, He never leaves us and is there for us in our time of need.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, we pray now, mindful that during this past week we have not always followed your heavenly example. There have been times when we have only thought about our own welfare, and in our own selfishness, we have ignored the feelings of others. We ask for your forgiveness, Lord, for the times when we have forgotten or ignored, what you have taught us through Your Holy Word. Amen.

Sunday, 12 February

Last week, we reflected on how the Lord saved Jonah from drowning at sea, even though he had disobeyed Him. Jonah is saved by being swallowed by a 'great fish'. This is the most well-known part of the story of Jonah, yet Jonah's prayer, whilst inside the fish, may not be as familiar and the beautiful words can be found by reading **Jonah, Chapter 2**.

The fate of Jonah is a reminder to us about what happens if we separate our faith from our lives. We get swallowed up, like Jonah devoured by the great fish. Our lives become consumed with material and sensual pleasures.

The great fish represents the forces of hell, the evil spirits within us all which make us prey to worldly temptation. If we deny the Lord in our lives and disobey his commands, then the meaning of our lives is replaced by hellish, selfish and material values.

However, it is important to realise that these temptations are not part of who we really are and can be. We are created by the Lord with the capacity for unselfish love and our self-centred nature at these

times is because we are being influenced by the hells. Swedenborg reminds us that "it is by the overflow of evils and falsities that come up out of hell, and as it were overwhelm, that temptations exist." ([Apocalypse Explained, 538](#))

If we allow the hells to take control of us, we can find that their temptations can be all consuming and too easily we can become obsessive about our own needs and wants. Yet this self-absorbed life does not make us happy. It can lead to the kind of despair which Jonah talks about in the words of his prayer; he feels like he is slowly sinking, overwhelmed by the sea, and falling into a pit from which there is no escape but to renew his faith in the Lord.

Even whilst in the fish, Jonah is under the divine protection of the Lord. When he prays, realising his own selfishness, the Lord saves Jonah. So even at the height of temptation, the Lord is still there waiting for us to turn to him in prayer and ask for his help. And so just as Jonah prays to God and he escapes the belly of the fish, so we are able to break free of the grip of selfish desires simply by turning to God in humble prayer.

One of the many reasons why the Lord forgives us is that He too faced the same temptations as us and crucially was able to overcome them. Jesus, in Matthew's gospel ([Matthew 12:39-41](#)), tells us that Jonah's fate mirrors his own combats with the hells. So when we pray, we know that the Lord understands all too well our suffering and in His unfailing love, he will help and save us.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, we come to you, as Jonah did, aware that there are times when we feel totally overwhelmed by our own desires. We ask for your guidance to enable us to see that true happiness comes from living a life enriched by your unselfish love. Amen.



Miniature di S. Alessio in Bigiano
(c.1270) Leaf from Bentivoglio Bible

Sunday 19 February

For the last two weeks, we have been reflecting on how Jonah, as an imperfect human being, mirrors the weaknesses we all share, yet the Lord loved and protected Jonah, as he does for all His creation. Having prayed to the Lord, acknowledging his error and giving thanks for God's protection, Jonah now finds himself back on dry land and for once he obeys the word of the

Lord. Now please read **Jonah Chapter 3**.

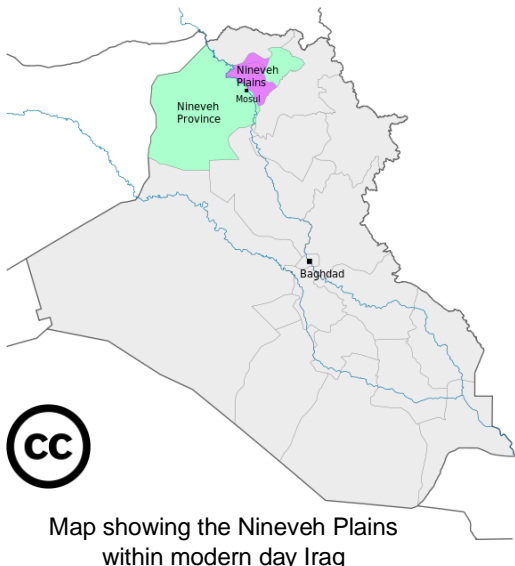
This chapter has more of a focus on the city and people of Nineveh rather than Jonah and so it is worth thinking about what the Ninevites might represent spiritually. At the time of Jonah, Nineveh was the capital of Assyria and was located on the outskirts of modern day Mosul in northern Iraq. Nineveh was "an exceeding great city of three days' journey." ([Jonah 3: 3 KJV](#)) and a hundred years later would become the largest city in the world. However, the Lord is distressed by the 'wickedness' of the city and sends Jonah to 'preach against it.' On a literal level, Nineveh could be seen as another pagan place, a potential enemy of the Jewish people and for modern day Christians a missionary call from God to bring the gospel to non-believers.

We need to think of this story as less an historical account of events which took place around 2800 years

and see it as message for our own spiritual development. Rev. George McCurdy has written a study guide for each of the Minor Prophets, based on New Church teachings, and in [his summary for this chapter](#), he writes that *"the great city of Nineveh has many spiritual representations. The world saw Nineveh as a mighty nation, but in the eyes of the Lord, it represented the shallowness and weakness ... of false doctrines."* Let us think about what that may mean for us by reflecting on those times when we may follow our value systems rather than those from the Word of God. It is not surprising in the modern world that we can be seduced by the focus on material possessions and social approval. We can be tempted by our senses to seek personal pleasure and we often justify these beliefs, when all we are really doing is excusing our own selfishness. At these times, we are no different from the Ninevites. Yet all is not lost. This is a time for self-examination, and like the Ninevites, we need to be truly sorry not just in our words but in our actions. The people of Nineveh fasted and all of them put on a sackcloth. ([Jonah 3:5](#)) Swedenborg, in [Apocalypse Revealed 492](#), explains that as clothes symbolise truth, wearing a sackcloth, which is not a garment, is an acknowledgement that we are not living our life according to the Lord's teachings. If we seek help from the Lord, then we can be assured of His compassion.

Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, Our Heavenly Father, we come to You aware that there are times when we have not lived our lives as you would wish for us. Just as You did for the people of Nineveh, we seek your forgiveness and compassion. Amen.



Sunday 26 February

In our final reflection, we return to the flawed character of Jonah, and his response to the Lord's compassion to the Ninevites, by reading **Jonah Chapter 4**.

Throughout the story of Jonah, but particularly in this chapter, we read how he was like many Jews at the time, convinced of their greatness and superiority as God's chosen people. Non-Jews were heathens and were to be avoided. Jonah is smug and self satisfied about his religion. Despite his previous experiences, Jonah still thought he knew better than the Lord. In his arrogance, Jonah expects privileged treatment and even criticises the Lord for being compassionate to his enemies.

Before we judge Jonah too harshly, let us reflect about those times when we too are guilty of these thoughts. We may be critical of other people who we may view as not having the same



high moral standards as us. May we feel our Swedenborgian

understanding of the Bible makes us feel superior to other Christians?

And how does the Lord respond to Jonah, and us, at these times? The warmth of His love continues to shine brightly, though this makes us uncomfortable. We do not like our values being questioned. Yet the Lord does not force His way on us, though he does challenge our selfish mindset

by sending the worm and the strong wind. Yet Jonah would prefer to die rather than approve of the Lord's saving the Ninevites and are we not, at times, stubborn in our views, preferring to stick to our misguided opinions rather than admit we are wrong and change our minds.

The [New Christian Bible Study](#) website provides some helpful [explanation of this chapter](#), pointing out that the attitude of Jonah is mirrored in the brother of the prodigal son ([Luke 15:28-29](#)), or the workers in the vineyard who had worked all day for a denarius ([Matthew 20:10-12](#)).

All these stories in the Bible remind us that we should not be resentful of the Lord's forgiving nature to those who we may feel are underserving of his compassion.

Now as we conclude our reflections on the book of Jonah, let us be assured that just as Lord used flawed human beings for His purpose in the Old Testament, He has a goal for us too. At times, we may not always live up to his plan, but despite our many failings, the Lord is constantly with us. As it reminds us in that well-known hymn, *Praise, my soul, the King of heaven*, He is always '[slow to chide and swift to bless](#).'

Prayer

Lord, we appreciate the way You are constantly guiding us and helping us to identify 'the Jonah' in our hearts and minds. We acknowledge our gratitude for Your forgiveness when we think we know best and prefer to go our own way and not follow Your path. We give thanks for Your conditional love for us, even during those times when we, like Jonah, separate our lives from Your spirit of wisdom and love. Amen.

WANTING TO BUILD A TOWER AND FIGHT A WAR

Please read Luke 14:25-35 and Doctrine of Life (Swedenborg) 101 and 102

Each day of our lives we should have the desire to build a tower, and so pile one idea upon another as we read and hear the Gospel. But beyond a certain point we have to be **COMMITTED** to what we are building. Truth in the Word of God begins as ideas, and so often we feel that these ideas will be useful to discuss and comment upon and sadly to judge others and put the world to rights! This of course is not the purpose of truth and soon it will begin to tell us so. When we build truth to create a structure of living it must become a structure of BEHAVIOUR! So often we build the truth trying to shape it into a way of thinking and later on we discover that the truth takes us over and **INSISTS** on shaping us.

To build this tower of truth to a logical conclusion requires discipline in our living and in our relations with our fellows. We need to look within ourselves daily and seek to remove our selfish weaknesses and try to reshape our plans and efforts in our relationship with others and this of course is never easy! It is very foolish in building a **PART** of truth (just being satisfied with ideas to explain and criticise the world around us) and not turning these ideas around on our own lives instead. When we read or discover a truth in the Word of God, we must use it to change us, to see what the truth is asking of us and make those necessary changes that it is asking of us. If we do not then this “tower” becomes a laughable ugly structure of self used rubble. Our tower is only completed when we use the truth that we understand to change the whole purpose and pattern of our living. We need to be fully aware of this before we pick up any truth and add it to our pile.

When we have this discipline of truth working in our lives we then run into another fundamental problem! By trying to live our lives by making the necessary changes that the Lord is asking of us will of course stir up all the selfishness within us to resist it! We shall find ourselves entering upon a war with our selfishness that has been an accepted way for so long. As adults we cannot resist wanting to be the centre of our own world – so often we cannot see things from any other angle. **OUR AMBITIONS AND PURPOSES** must come first and if we decide to do something good it is **OUR GOOD THING!** In building correctly our tower of truth will involve us recognising our selfish way of living and immediately it will be strong enough to maintain itself. Let there be no doubt how strong it must be! We have all the clever explanations and arguments that excuse and cover up our fundamental selfishness that powers our lives (10,000 of them). And behind all that we have the complete power of own self with its lusts of greed and power (10,000 of them too!) So, we face an army of 20,000! All of our cunning and evasive arguments would be enough to handle plus the additional fact **THAT WE WANT LIFE TO BE FOR US!** Now this is the point to which the truth about Jesus Christ has been leading us. **THERE IS ANOTHER LIFE AVAILABLE!** There is all the giving love of God alive at our level where he brought it as Jesus Christ. The other “half of our army” and the strength even to overthrow ourselves. But now more is involved than just obedience and discipline of truth – we must make a choice to live the Lord’s way of life. We need to reject the selfishness we know in ourselves and desire to lead a new way of life in Jesus Christ, and in doing this and making room for it, there will be a loving life available to use us in its giving way.

“In the same way, those of you who do not give up everything you have cannot be my disciples.”
Luke 14:33

May God bless us and keep us in doing His work.

CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHIP

Please read Luke 5: 1—11 and Heavenly Doctrine (Swedenborg) THE CHURCH 241-245

The Lake of Gennesaret (or the Sea of Galilee) covers 112 miles and is well stocked with fish, and even today producing over 1200 tons a year. The first disciples earned their living fishing the lake. Simon and Andrew were apparently using a cast net, dropped over the fish by someone standing in the water; but they would have had boat, as had Zebedee. It seems likely that those Jesus called had heard him teaching in Galilee, but it must have required considerable determination to leave their settled way of life and follow the Lord.

It will also require much determination in us to leave our old accustomed way of life and begin with a new motive of living. Clearly, we are being called to become disciples of Jesus and we see, in the call of these disciples over two thousand years ago, our own call today. But the disciples are varied in type. If we are to learn about and use a new way of life from Jesus Christ, then there have to be various things in our mind that will follow him. Just as he called the disciples in the world, Jesus calls certain powers in our mind. The transformation of the first disciples from catching fish to catching people depicts such a call in our mind. Fish are often described as cold-blooded, but the truth is that they take on the temperature of their surroundings. They have no source of warmth in themselves. The ideas of truth we understand are like that at first. We fish them out of the Bible, and they take their warmth of affection from the circumstances of the moment. Sometimes it is the cold light of just knowing, or sometimes sadly the burning criticism of someone else, sometimes it has the warmth of our fellowship with those from whom we learn. Now none of these provides an indwelling love that acts and powers the truth that we understand. But if we become a disciple of Jesus and follow his way, we then concentrate on loving and helping others. The truths we know are no longer “cold fish” but become part of the way of loving. They have their own warmth from the love that works in them and so truly become human in their nature. We too shall “catch people.” The life of our mind will change its concentration and follow Jesus. Not all of our knowledge will be transformed at one time from just cold knowing to warm and human understanding, but this is the process that will carry on when we truly try to follow Jesus.

If we are to use the gospel in this personal way, we have now a number of things to identify in ourselves. Clearly the four disciples here are different aspects of our discipleship. The four gospels as a whole identify Simon, later called Peter, as the rock of faith on which the church is built. Our “Simon” is the way we believe the truth, which is the bedrock of all our living. This has a necessary brother, Andrew, in our obedience to what we believe. John is the “beloved disciple” of the gospel and typifies our love for the Lord that motivates us. He too has a brother in the acts of love and compassion that express that love to others. This is James. It is worth pointing out that the two sets of brothers are occupied at first in different ways. Faith and obedience, Peter and Andrew are fishing with the net of intelligence for more ideas. Love and its acts of compassion, John and James, are mending nets, for it is love that strives to make sure our intelligence catches ideas securely from love. It is more interested to make sure our thought is loving than just the number of ideas we actually catch on to. These “disciples” are not separate in our mind. They express the various aspects of our Christianity in our life that work together in following our Lord. All such powers in us must accept the call to leave our old way of life and all that fathered it and follow the new way.

TRANSFIGURED

Please read Matthew 17: 1-13 and Apocalypse Explained (Swedenborg) 594 (paragraph 2)

Now that the disciples have acknowledged Jesus as the Christ and begun to realise something of the awe-inspiring future they are committed to, Jesus shows his real nature to three of them in a vision. The disciples first began to follow Jesus because he was a miracle worker. They were drawn to him by his power to heal and by the message of peace and love that he taught. Only slowly does it seem to have dawned on them that they had become involved in something so great and immense as God's work among men and women to redeem them, to give them the opportunity of a new life of salvation.

The Gospel is revealing God's love acting to save humanity from its selfishness, but in a personal way it is also talking to us of our own individual salvation. We are no quicker in seeing what is happening to us than the disciples were in grasping the nature of Jesus' presence with them. At first, we are keen to understand a message of change that will heal our lives. We accept a command to repent and follow the teaching, but it is quite a while before it dawns on us that God is coming alive in us. We are dealing with a Christ, a Messiah, a "coming one," anointed with the love of God to make that life our life. Eventually the change in us will be immense. We shall have to go with him through the agony of realising the cruel selfishness of our own life. We must see how it kills his life, before he can truly rise up, a new life in us.

On the way, we do see something of the real nature of Jesus with us, as the disciples were granted a vision of him totally changed in his appearance, "transfigured." The word used in the Greek is a very strong word, carrying the idea of a magical change. To the disciples it must indeed have seemed to be that. Jesus' clothes shone with brightness. Luke tells us that his face shone. He became a being of light, the living Word, God's love working through the truth. In him, divine love was rebuilding human life unselfishly by using the way of truth revealed in the Word of God.

This was made obvious by his companions in the vision, Moses and Elijah. The whole of the Law was attributed to Moses. Elijah, as one of the first prophets and the one who was to be forerunner to the Messiah, stands for all the prophets. To a Jew, the Word of God was the Law and the Prophets. They represented the truth of life, and this was coming alive from the love of God in Jesus. Yet the disciples did not grasp what this meant. We, like them, begin to understand that a totally new force is at work in us, but we do not grasp its real nature. We tend to think of it as a new set of ideas. Peter's stupid remark about making three shelters for Moses, Elijah, and Jesus pictures our inability to realise that Jesus is not just a way to transmit truth to humanity, like the Old Testament, or the New Testament for that matter. He is the truth alive from the whole love of God.

The voice from the cloud shows to us that, even in our clouded understanding, we are driven to understand at last that the love of God has come alive at our level. It has been born into our earthly life in its own truth from God, "a beloved son." We, and all of humanity for all time, have God's love alive in us as our redeemer. The Gospels enable us, like the disciples, to know and use and rejoice about the work of God, which redeemed all humankind. It also enables us personally to understand how this love from God can work in us for our salvation. For so wonderful a gift, thanks be to God.

THE BIRTH OF MOSES

Please read Exodus 2: 1-10

When you think of all the selfishness in us which must be conquered, it seems amazing that the Lord can ever get anything of His truth into our minds to bring about necessary change. We, who are so sure of our own strength, so selfish in our own ambitions, how then can the truth which opposes all that be preserved in us? In this story, the wonder of Moses preservation despite the efforts of the evil pharaoh, is a wonderful parable to us of the way the beginnings of Christianity can live within our selfish tendencies. Moses is hidden in an ark made of bulrushes, which is floated on the waters of the Nile. These bulrushes are the papyrus reeds from which the first paper was made (hence its name). And OUR Moses of truth is also hidden for safety in a paper boat – the pages of the Bible. At first, our desires will be selfish and greedy, and the boat will be pitched with bitumen and pitch. In our learning of the Word, our selfishness and pride will stick to it, as a child takes pride in reciting the Bible and an adult takes satisfaction in quoting it against others. But, because the truth is hidden away in our ark of learning, our selfishness does not recognise this different kind of knowledge for the living force it can become. And this is the way each one of us can eventually be led out of our selfish slavery and on to the land of heavenly life. The wisdom of God can be hidden in our mind so long as our selfishness thinks it is just another kind of knowledge. The other reeds by the river bank make an excellent camouflage for the ark of Moses; and in the same way, all our other kinds of learning about life and the world look so remarkably like our knowledge of the Word, that it can safely hide in them. The river of our thoughts and arguments for our own way flows on without dislodging this different knowledge in which hides a living power. And our selfishness, like the evil Pharaoh, does not recognise and so cannot destroy the foothold God is making in our lives. But without some love to feed on, the truth will not grow up to be powerful. **And so, the women come into the story.** Moses had two women as his mother – a nominal mother in the princess of Egypt who found him, and his real mother as his nurse to suckle and raise him. This outlines for us the way a love for this truth begins to grow in our life. The princess of Egypt does not really worship the Lord. In a sentimental way she gets an interest in the tiny baby found in the ark on the river. The first beginnings of our religious life are like that. There is a kind of religious sentimental feeling in our mind which for example pities those in desperate want, which likes the sense of reassurance of those who believe, which worries about whether the world has any real purpose for us. **BUT IN NO WAY IS IT WORSHIPPING THE LORD!** We do not see our own selfishness; we are not repenting and we are not willing to be a servant of the Lord because we still want everything for our own comfort and reassurance. Yet, this vague feeling pulls Moses out of the water! It recognises a “babe” of the Hebrews in the river of self-centred thought and it sees that, within these particular reeds of learning, there is something alive, peculiarly different to all else in our earthly mind. It is the recognition of this distinction which begins to make things happen. While our natural mind wants to understand and use this new life, it is possible for good within to begin to strengthen it. **So, in the story, when offered the real mother as the nurse, the princess is willing that she should look after the child.** The only thing that can really bring strength and life into the truth is a true desire to do good. Slowly the truth is strengthened by this, and what began as a vague and sentimental religious attitude becomes willing to accept the child when he is brought to her as her own. In our own life, as we begin to see the implications of truth, how it demands changes in our life so that we act from good, we shall be challenged and must ourselves make a choice to accept this new living power in the truth as our own. **From the love of the real mother, we can ensure that in one human life, Moses is “drawn” out of the water to begin our development to be a servant of the Lord.**