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Beverly E.C.C., Chicago, IL

“A BETTER REVELATION”
Jonah; Hebrews 1:1-3

These past few weeks have been tough.

The infection on both of my elbows caused intense itching and burning. At its worst, it felt as if thousands of worms were trying to squirm their way out of my skin.

The discomfort of my allergic reaction to Keflex was not as extreme, but it was more extensive. Hives covered my sides, my belly, my back, my groin. I itched all over, even in places where my skin was clear.

It was hardest in the middle of the night. I would get up and pace around the house, alone in the dark, up to an hour and 45 minutes at a time.

I prayed, a lot. I cried out to God most of the time I was awake at night, and frequently through the day: “Help!” “Lord, heal me!” “Give me strength!” “Thank you for being with me!” “I need you!”

I kept coming back to that last one. “I need you!”

My need for God is constant, profound, and all-encompassing. I understand this; yet I do not always *sense* my need, do not always *feel* it.

Then a crisis occurs and my eyes are opened again. This struggle has once more made me acutely aware of my utter dependence on the Almighty for sustenance, sanity, and survival itself.

At the height of it, when pain has our bodies, minds, and souls firmly in its iron grip, we plead with God to stop

the agony. We want a cure, we want rescue, we want provision.

That is a good place to start. But when we stop there, it becomes a problem.

Often when YHWH heals us we stop pleading, as though good health is our deepest need. It is not.

When he rescues us we stop supplicating, as though safety is our deepest need. It is not.

When he provides we stop entreating, as though money and possessions are our deepest need. They are not.

Our deepest need is not the *things* the Lord can give us.

Our deepest need is not the *favours* the Lord can do for us.

Our deepest need is *God himself*. It is the being of God, the person of God in our lives.

Consider this analogy: as friends and spouses we give gifts to each other and do kind deeds for one another – but if that is as far as it goes, the relationship is a poor one. The beating heart of close friendship and healthy marriage is mutual presence.

It is being together, really being *with* each other. It is giving of oneself. It is sharing one’s soul.

As much as we need dear friends – and possibly a husband or wife – we need God more. Not an absent deity, a present one. Not a distant divinity, a near one. The closer the better!

● The author of the New Testament book of Hebrews gets at this: ^{1:1} **“In the past God spoke to**

our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways...”

The prophets were set apart by the LORD YHWH to speak on his behalf, thereby revealing him to Israel, and sometimes to Gentiles. By proclaiming his Word, they communicated God’s truth, God’s will, and God’s plan.

But not only so! Those who were attentive could catch glimpses of God’s heart: his joy and sorrow, his delight and disappointment, his pleasure and pain.

Still, those glimpses were fleeting and dim. They were more of a memory than an ongoing reality. The Living God was present in them, sort of.

- Hebrew continues:
1:2 **...but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe.** ³ **The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word.**

“In the past God spoke... through the prophets... but in these last days he has spoken... by his Son.” The implication is that God’s revelation **“by his Son”** is far superior to what came **“through the prophets.”**

This is true of any prophet, even the best. Yet it is glaringly, strikingly, stunningly obvious with Jonah.

□ Please turn with me to the Book of Jonah.

■ In 1:1-2 **“¹ The word of the LORD [comes] to Jonah: ² ‘Go to the great city Nineveh’** (the capital of

the Assyrian Empire) **“and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me.”**

■ **“But”** (verse 3) **“Jonah [runs] away... and [heads] for Tarshish,”** a city at the opposite end of the Mediterranean, in what is now Spain. **“He [goes] down to Joppa, ... [seeks out] a ship bound for that port. [Pays] the fare... he [goes] aboard and [sails] for Tarshish to flee from the LORD.”**

☞ When Jonah was called to speak for God to the Assyrians, he rebelled. He intentionally ran away.

- {Php 2:6-7} In contrast God the Son, who is

**in very nature God,
did not consider equality with God
something to be used to his
own advantage;
rather, he made himself nothing
by taking the very nature of a servant,
being made in human likeness.**

☆ He knew the incarnation would cost him everything. Yet when the Father called the Son to speak to humanity, he obeyed. Jesus is a better revelation of God.

■ In Jonah 1:4 the Almighty responds to Jonah’s rebellion by sending (literally, **“hurling”**) **“a great wind on the sea, and such a violent storm arose that the ship [threatens] to break up.”**

■ Verse 5: The sailors **“[throw] the cargo into the sea to lighten the ship,”** forfeiting their commission in the process. Alas, their costly sacrifice makes no difference.

■ They “[do] **their best to row back to land,**” verse 13. **“But they [cannot], for the sea [has grown] even wilder than before.”**

☞ The sailors were terrified, suffered financial loss, and might have drowned. Jonah endangered others for his own selfish purposes.

● In contrast the Son saved countless people from infirmity, disease, demonization, and death. Jesus spoke for his Father and ministered to the lowly and the lost despite vehement opposition.

☆ In the end Messiah died for us, that we might be reconciled to God and rescued from bondage to sin and death. Jesus is a better revelation of God.

■ In Jonah 3:1-2 **“the word of the LORD [comes] to Jonah a second time: ‘Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you.’”** This time he obeys, but only because the King of the Universe has put him through the wringer.

☞ It is a safe bet that, had he been given a choice, this prophet would never have gone to Assyria. Jonah obeyed God grudgingly.

● {Mk 14:32-39} In contrast when the Son was **“overwhelmed with sorrow”** by the horror of his impending execution he begged three times, **“Abba, Father, everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me.”** But all three times he said after that, **“Yet not what I will, but what you will.”**

☆ He surrendered his desires and deliberately brought his will in line with his Father’s will. Jesus obeyed God willingly. Jesus is a better revelation of God.

■ In Jonah 3, the Ninevites believe Jonah’s message. {3:5, 8, 10} **“All of them, from the greatest to the least,”** wear sackcloth, fast from food and water, call urgently on God, and renounce **“Their evil ways and their violence.”** **“When God [sees] what they are doing”** he spares them from **“the destruction he [has] threatened.”**

■ This is exactly what Jonah feared would happen. In 4:1-3 he is very angry: **“This is what I tried to forestall by fleeing to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity. Now, LORD, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live.”**

■ In verse 5 the prophet **“[goes] out and [sits] down”** outside Nineveh, and **“[waits] to see what [will] happen”** to it. No doubt he is hoping that the Almighty will reconsider and obliterate Nineveh.

☞ Jonah literally kept his distance. He withdrew from the sinful Assyrians because he hated them.

● {Lk 19:10; Jn 4:1ff; Jn 8:2-11; Mt 9:11} In contrast **“the Son... came to seek and to save [the] lost.”** He initiated conversation with a Samaritan woman, interacted with unrighteous Gentiles, extended mercy to adulterers, and, in what was seen as a shocking display of solidarity, he habitually **“[ate] with tax collectors and sinners”**

☆ The Savior did not withdraw in disgust from reprobates. He did not keep his distance from them to

maintain his own purity. He drew near to sinners because he loved them. Jesus is a better revelation of God.

These past few weeks I have needed God to heal the infection, needed God to protect me during the allergic reaction, needed God to maintain my sanity. Even more than that I have needed God himself, *God himself*, the person of God in my life.

{Jn 1:14} Praise the LORD, he did not stop when he sent Jonah! YHWH himself has come near to us in “**Word** [who] **became flesh**,” Christ Jesus his Son!

In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word.

The word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.