|  |
| --- |
| **THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR****"A Greater Than Jonah Is Here”****Rev. Carl Haak**haak@prca.org**September 25, 2011; No. 3586**(Printed copies in a four-message booklet can be sent monthly without charge.  Request from: Reformed Witness Hour, Box 1230, Grand Rapids, MI 49501) |

Dear radio friends,

    In the past weeks we have examined the content of the book of Jonah, the record of the strong-willed prophet and of God’s unique and merciful dealings with him.  We saw that the theme of that book is the sovereignty of God’s mercy, as we read in [Romans 9:18](http://bible.gospelcom.net/bible?version=KJV&passage=Romans+9:18), “Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth.”   And we say that the book brings to us the beautiful faithfulness of God to His rebellious, strong-willed prophet, and it shows us the truth of [Lamentations 3](http://bible.gospelcom.net/bible?version=KJV&passage=Lamentations+3), “It is of the Lord’s mercies that we are not consumed, … great is thy faithfulness.”  Or, as the apostle Paul expressed in [I Corinthians 15](http://bible.gospelcom.net/bible?version=KJV&passage=I+Corinthians+15), I am what I am by the grace of God.

      We conclude our series on the book of Jonah by considering an amazing observation from the lips of our Lord Jesus on the ministry of Jonah.  Our Lord spoke of Jonah in [Matthew 12:41](http://bible.gospelcom.net/bible?version=KJV&passage=Matthew+12:41).   We read, “The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it:  because they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here.”  Our Lord Jesus Christ assumed that His listeners would be acquainted with details of Jonah.  And I may assume that that should be true now of my audience today.  Our Lord says to men of His day (and to you and to me), that although Jonah has lived many years ago, the record of Jonah has a bearing on you and me, even to the day of judgment.  The book of Jonah is not just a story.  There is something of Jonah which impinges on you and on me.  What is that?

      The book of Jonah brings out this truth:  the greater the worth and the light of the messenger, the greater the responsibility or guilt if the message is rejected.

      Let us look, for a moment, at the context of our Lord’s words in [Matthew 12](http://bible.gospelcom.net/bible?version=KJV&passage=Matthew+12).   The scribes and Pharisees had walked up to Jesus with apparent, outward politeness and respect.  “Master, we would see a sign from Thee.”  They hated Jesus and they were coming with an outward veneer.

      What they were saying really was that none of the marvelous healings Jesus had already performed was sufficient to prove that He stood before them as the Son of God.  The request that they make to Him, though it is spoken in polite words, was insulting.  They were saying, “Yes, perhaps you have shown some compassion toward the miserable; but if you expect us to believe, you must show us a real sign — something thrilling, something sensational, something dramatic, perhaps from the heavens.  Perhaps if you could take the constellation Orion and change it with the bull Taurus or turn the Big Dipper upside-down or blaze your name across the sky in purple, then we would believe you.  Show us a sign from heaven.”

      The Lord’s response was, “An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign.  But there shall no sign be given unto it but the sign of the prophet Jonah.”  Jesus was not fooled by their outward courtesy, an outward courtesy that masked an unbelieving heart.  He sees them as those who loved the darkness and hated the light, and He calls them an evil generation, corrupt, that is, that their motives were despicable and cruel and proud.  He says, “You are an adulterous generation.  You are spiritually unfaithful to your God.  You have gone a-whoring.  You want a sign from Me?  No sign will be given you but the sign of the prophet Jonah.”  Specifically He says to them, “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.”  A sign?  You want some display of physical power?  No, I’m going to give you a mighty display of the power of grace.  God will give His Son over to death, the death of the cross, for the sin of God’s people.  And He will raise Him the third day.  This shall be the sign of the mighty saving grace of God.

      Then He turns the scene on the Jews.  “You need something more to believe on Me?  You need something more to persuade you and convince you?  My coming from God and My dying upon a cross for sin, that is not enough for you?  I tell you that the men of Nineveh shall condemn this generation because *they* repented at the preaching of Jonah.  And a greater than Jonah is here.”  He is saying to them that the men and women, boys and girls, who, through the grace of God, believed and repented under the preaching of Jonah are going to stand up and condemn the Jews for rejecting Jesus Christ.  They will say to them, “You are inexcusable.  You stood in a clear light, because a greater than Jonah stood before you.  We received little rays of light, a little glimpse through the prophet Jonah.  But *you* received the very Son of God in your midst.  And you did not believe Him.”

      The point that the Lord is making is that the greater the light, the greater the responsibility and the greater the guilt of rejecting the Lord.

      Jesus Christ is the greater than Jonah.  He is greater than Jonah in His very person and office.  Jonah was a man, a sinful man.  He was in need of God’s redeeming love and grace.  Jonah had been set aside as a chosen vessel.  But Jonah was a clay pot.  He was filled with much imperfection.  When God told him to go and preach against Nineveh, he rebelled and needed to be admonished and brought to obey God.

      But our Lord Jesus Christ?  Our Lord Jesus Christ is the obedient and perfect Son of God.  Our Lord Jesus Christ did not receive His message by bits and pieces.  But He dwelt with the Father.  He was *in* the Father’s bosom.  He said, “He that cometh from above is above all:  he that is of the earth is earthly, and speaketh of the earth:  he that cometh from heaven is above all.  And what he hath seen and heard, that he testifieth; and no man receiveth his testimony” ([John 3:31, 32](http://bible.gospelcom.net/bible?version=KJV&passage=John+3:31,32)).

      There is the contrast.  Jonah was a man.  God had made him to be a prophet.  Jonah was given the Word from the lips of God.  Jesus Christ is the Son of God.  He is intimate with the Father.  He knows and declares the full revelation of God.  Jonah came from Israel to Nineveh.  Jesus came from heaven to earth.  Jonah was a prophet and he spoke some things.  Christ is God Himself, the very living Word of God who knows all things and declares the truth.

      Now, to reject *Him?*  Surely those who, by the grace of God, believed Jonah will stand up and condemn those who reject the word of Jesus Christ.

      This is confirmed to us in the book of Hebrews (2:1-4).  There the apostle says that if God validated the word that was spoken by angels, that was spoken by the Old Testament prophets, by Jonah, if God validated that word, so that all who received their word with indifference received judgment from God,  of how much greater punishment do you suppose one will be worthy if he rejects the word spoken through the Son, spoken through the completed Bible?

      Jonah was a man in whom God had placed His word.  Jesus Christ *is* the Word of God.  In Jesus Christ and through the holy Scriptures, the whole will of God is revealed.  The whole counsel of God concerning our redemption is declared to us in Jesus Christ.  And now Jesus declares that a greater than Jonah is here.  Notice that He does not say how much greater.  He simply says, “greater.”  Jonah was a little picture.  He was a flash of light in the dark sea of the Old Testament.  Now the Son of God stands before the Jews.  And the Son of God has given to us the completed and inspired holy Scriptures.  Of how much greater punishment will one be made worthy if he rejects this very Son of God?

      Do you see the application?  Our light is greater even than the Lord’s generation.  Jesus Christ has died upon the cross and is risen.  He is exalted at the Father’s right hand and the Father hath given to us the holy Scriptures and poured out the Holy Spirit.  Now the Father has sent preaching to us in the name of Jesus Christ so that through that preaching, the preaching of the holy Scriptures, the voice of Jesus Christ is heard by His sheep.  When we come to worship in the appointed way of God, when we come to church and hear the preaching of the Word of God and we bow our heads under that Word of God and that Word of God is preached to us in its truth, then a greater than Jonah is before us — the living and abiding Word of Christ.

      Jesus Christ and His gospel is nothing that you may simply ignore, push aside.  You may not simply say, “Oh, well, that is a quaint relic of the past.  That’s ancient tradition.  Let’s come and blow the dust off the cover and see what we like about it.”  You may not say that!

      No, Jesus Christ and His gospel, His Word, and the preaching of Jesus Christ is the glorious revelation of the truth, the only truth of salvation.  The greater than Jonah is here.  Let us take heed to that Word of God.  Let us hold fast that Word of God.  Let us bow in repentance.  For if, having heard the greater revelation through Jesus Christ, you and I would reject it and go our own way in unbelief, the very men of Nineveh will rise up in the judgment against us.  For, when they heard Jonah who was just a minor light compared to Jesus, they repented.

      Still more.  We see that Jesus Christ is greater in His obedience.  Jonah was marked by disobedience and by being very reluctant.  From the opening commission that he received from God to go to Nineveh even to the last chapter of the book, Jonah revealed himself as being narrow of heart and disobedient before his God.

      How different when we turn in the pages of Scripture to the gospel narratives of the life of our Lord Jesus Christ.  Our Savior was commissioned of God the Father and He was sent to secure the salvation of the host of God’s elect.  He came with a holy and ardent and obedient heart.  It was the Lord Jesus who could say to His disciples who had returned from a village seeking food, “I have meat to eat that ye know not of.  My meat is to do the will of him that sent me and to finish his work.”  He could say to them, “I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished.”

      Always the Lord Jesus Christ was the obedient Son of God who had come to perform all the Father’s good pleasure.  Even when He knew that that meant that He must be humbled, humbled down to the deepest sorrows and reproach of God against our sin upon a cross; even when He knew that it would bring Him into the awful and horrible darkness of the cross; yet our Lord Jesus Christ was the obedient Son of God who, in love for the Father and in love for His church, said, “I come, I come to do Thy will, O God.”  He was not a reluctant prophet.  He was not a reluctant Savior.  But His will burned within Him to obey all the will and word of His heavenly Father.  He is the greater than Jonah.

      The men of Nineveh repented at the preaching of Jonah.  He was a reluctant prophet.  Yet they repented.  They repented under the preaching of a narrow-hearted prophet.  Now we hear the Word of God sent from Jesus Christ, whose heart loves the accomplishment of God’s will.  We hear His Word, which does not come to us thus, “Well, this is what I’m supposed to tell you and so let’s get on with it and let’s be done with it.”  But it comes to us by the Spirit of Christ, the Spirit of Christ who loves to obey the Father.  We hear the Word of Christ!  Now, what will our apathy and indifference be met with if we hear the Word of the greater Jonah and turn away with unbelief and reject that Word?

      There is a terrible sin in greeting the gospel with apathy.  There is a terrible sin in greeting Jesus Christ with indifference.  He is the greater than Jonah.  He is the obedient servant of God.  Hear His word and believe.

      Still more.  Our Lord Jesus Christ was greater than Jonah in His power, the power of judgment.  Jonah was sent to proclaim judgment of almighty God upon those who would lift themselves up against God.  He could not bring that judgment.  But Jesus executes the judgments of God.  He not only brings the Word of God, but He executes the judgments of God.  He sits upon the throne, and all men shall be judged by Him.  He is the mighty Son of God.  But He is great also in His power of salvation.  Jonah could not save.  It was the Spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ that worked in Nineveh and saved the people of God.  Nor could Jonah furnish the grace of repentance, the grace of a new and holy life.  He could not bring that, of his power, to his audience.  The Ninevites could come to Jonah and say, “Jonah, I believe what you say is true.  Can you do something to break my heart from the chains of sin?  Can you turn away my lust and make me pure?”  Jonah would have to shake his head and say, “No, I can’t do that.  The very fact that you even believe my preaching is not due to my power.  It is due to the power of my God.  I don’t have that power.  I look to my God with dependent eyes just as you must look to Him to break the power of sin in your life.”

      But now the greater than Jonah is before us — the One who *gives* repentance — the One who works within us both to will and to do of God’s good pleasure.  His is the power of repentance.  We can preach repentance as Jonah preached repentance.  But we cannot give repentance.  Christ is the One who gives repentance.  Through His Word preached He breaks the power of sin.  Through the proclamation of the gospel and through the living Scriptures declared to you, He actually cuts away the iron bracelets and iron chains of your sins and gives to you repentance.

      Where do I find strength to repent?  Where do I find the grace to change those ingrained patterns of my life going unto every sin?  That power is found in Jesus Christ, for He is the power of the living God.  The greater than Jonah is here.

      Our Lord Jesus Christ is risen from the dead.  And He is at the right hand of His heavenly Father.  As the Lord of the church He gives the fullness of salvation to His church.  And He reigns.  In the shadows of the Old Testament the Word of Jesus Christ preached by Jonah brought the Ninevites to repentance.  Now you and I stand in a far clearer light:  the completed work of Jesus Christ, the full inspired Scriptures, the church called to preach to us the faithful truth of the Scriptures.  As you stand before that greater light of fulfillment in Christ, the Word of God comes to you and says, “In the day of judgment the men of Nineveh will condemn all who wickedly and foolishly reject the Christ of the Scriptures.  For when they heard Jonah, they repented.  Of how much greater punishment shall they be found worthy who reject the great Light of the greater than Jonah?”

      Do you stand before the gospel with indifference?  Or, by the grace of God, do you stand in repentance?  And do you look to Jesus Christ, by grace, as all of your salvation?  And do you marvel over a mercy of God shown to you so undeserving?

      Let us cast, by faith, all our hope upon the greater Jonah, upon Jesus Christ.  Let us stand in His light.  Let us hear His Word.  And, by the grace of God, turning from our sins, be assured that in Him we have escaped eternal judgment and we shall live forever and ever.

      Let us pray.

      Father, we thank Thee for Thy Word and we pray that Thou would apply it unto our hearts.  Through Jesus Christ we pray, Amen.