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| **THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR****"Arise, Go, and Cry Against It!” Rev. Carl Haak July 10, 2011; No. 3575** |

Dear radio friends,

    Today I would like to begin a study of the prophecy of Jonah.  There are a number of reasons why I pick this book of the holy Scriptures.  First, Jonah teaches us the sovereignty of God over our lives — that is, the truth that God sovereignly, powerfully, graciously, wisely rules over the lives of His people.

      The book of Jonah is unique among the Old Testament prophets in that it is the life of the prophet more than his message which is the content of the book.  If you are acquainted with the other prophecies of the Old Testament (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea, Joel, Amos), you know that we are given in those prophecies scant details of the lives of those men.  The prophecies of those prophets consist of the sermons that they preached.  But the extent of Jonah’s sermon was, “Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown.”  The book of Jonah centers upon Jonah’s life. Jonah’s rebellion against his commission from God to go to Nineveh, Jonah’s unhappiness over God’s mercy — these become the theme of the entire book.  His life more than his message is the content of the book.  Or, we may say, the message of the book is written in his life.

      That means that in this book we are really taught about ourselves and about God’s sovereign, wise dealings with us.  We are like Jonah, Jonah who ran away from his commission, Jonah who resented God showing mercy to the people he thought were unworthy, Jonah who pouted when God accomplished something contrary to his own will.  There is not a point in the book where we will not be able to see ourselves.

      But we must also see God — God sovereignly accomplishing His own purpose in dealing with His son Jonah, and in keeping the prophet who ran away.

      The second reason why the book of Jonah is so instructive is that it teaches us the sovereignty of God in His mercy.  The book will illustrate what we read in [Romans 9](http://bible.gospelcom.net/bible?version=KJV&passage=Romans+9):   “I will have mercy upon whom I will have mercy, and whom I will, I will harden.”  God will send the gospel to whomsoever He in His good pleasure wills to send it.  In His mercy, He will powerfully bring to repentance His own elect, even where their wickedness has come up before His face.

        Therefore, the call of the church, the commission given to the church, is:  Arise, go, and cry against it.  That is, Preach the Word of God!  The gospel of the Word of God must go forth, and the church must be faithful to bring that sovereign Word, in the certainty that God is going to accomplish His purpose in the sending forth of His glorious Word.

      We begin our study of the book of Jonah with the first verses of the prophecy:  “Now the word of the LORD came unto Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before me.”  Who was Jonah?  Well, Jonah is thrust upon us with the other prophets.  We might have been given something of the setting and details of his life, but Jonah is simply thrust upon us.  Everything in the book is concerned with his unique and his unparalleled commission:  Arise, go, and cry against Nineveh, that great city.  Nineveh was the capital of Assyria, the mightiest nation in the world at that time.  Our focus is directed straight to this commission.

      There is a passage, however, [II Kings 14:23-27](http://bible.gospelcom.net/bible?version=KJV&passage=II+Kings+14:23-27), which gives us some information on the man Jonah.  Jonah lived at the midway point of the kingdom of the ten tribes of Israel.  Those ten tribes, you will recall, had broken away from the house of David under Jeroboam.  They were given over to idolatry and there was a steady degeneracy among them, until they would be destroyed by this very nation, Assyria (Nineveh), to which Jonah is sent.

      Jonah lived during the reign of Jeroboam II.  Under Jeroboam II the ten tribes reached their peak of prominence and prosperity.  We read in [II Kings 14](http://bible.gospelcom.net/bible?version=KJV&passage=II+Kings+14) of this Jeroboam II that he did evil in the sight of the Lord and he departed not from this evil.  However, he restored the coasts of Israel from the entering in of Hamath unto the sea of the plain, according to the Word of the God of Israel, which he spake by the hand of his servant Jonah, the son of Amittai, the prophet, which was of Gath-hepher.

      We learn here that Jonah was from Gath-hepher, which was in the land of Zebulon.  His father was Amittai, which means, “The truth of God.”  He was, then, a recognized prophet laboring in the ten tribes.  Most importantly, then, we learn two things about Jonah.  He lived in a day, first of all, in which God’s people did evil in God’s sight.  They followed the sin of Jeroboam who made the golden calves.  And they progressed in the degeneracy of their sin, specifically of the rejection of the Word of the Lord.  However, it was a time of great affluence and prosperity.  Apparently they concluded that it was OK to set aside God’s Word.  Nothing bad comes when that is done.  Those were the days in which he lived.

      Secondly, Jonah had witnessed an unusual display of God’s mercy toward the remnant of grace that was still in Israel.  Jonah had witnessed that, although the nation under Jeroboam II showed itself worthy of destruction, God yet dealt with that nation out of His mercy toward the elect remnant among them and He would not yet blot them out, because His purpose for them was not yet complete.

      We need to underscore both of these in our minds as we study the book of Jonah.  First, Jonah lived in a day when Israel showed themselves hardened in their sin and rejection of God’s Word.  Second, Jonah had seen the mercy of God directed toward the remnant of His grace, which allowed the judgment not to come upon that wicked nation prematurely.

      Then we can understand something of the reason for the commission of Jonah.  “Arise, go to Nineveh and cry against it.”  Behind that commission is the truth that the gospel of grace is going to go to the nations upon the rejection of the Word of God by the Jews.  That is the first thing we learn.  If you want to have that fleshed out for you, you should read the book of Romans, chapters 10 and 11.  There is a principle here.  And there is a principle that you must hear with great sobriety, soberness, in your heart.  That principle is this:  The Word of God leaves those who reject it.  And it goes to a people who, by grace, will be made to hear it and tremble before it.

      Do you know the Word of God?  Do you sit in the church?  Do you hear the gospel preached?  Is your church, historically, a church that has stood upon the truths of the Word of God?  Do you become complacent and indifferent to the Word of God?  There is a principle.  Where the Word of God has been in generations, and now a generation arises that becomes apathetic, careless, hearts fixed elsewhere upon the things of this world, then that Word of God is going to be taken away and given to a people whom God will raise up to treasure it and to publish it.

      That principle is illustrated time after time in the history of the church.  Always it happens when in the church there arise those who question the accuracy of God’s Word; when there becomes a feeling in the church that we decide what we are going to accept in the Bible and what we will not; when the church is concerned simply to be accepted by the world, not to stand out different from the world.  Always when that comes into the church and the church is viewed merely as an institution “to make me feel good and to give me my happy hour on Sunday,” when the people of God, the church, views itself that way, then the Word of God is taken away and the power of that Word will be demonstrated in others.  Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.  Listen.  It is not enough for you simply to nod your head and to give formal assent to God and to His Word.  It is not enough simply to keep a pretext of religion while you set your heart upon the flesh and upon the world.  We must love the Word of God and the precious gospel.

      Why was Jonah sent to Nineveh?  First of all, to show that God takes His Word from the complacent and raises up a people who will receive it by His grace.  What is your attitude, right now, and your posture, right now, towards God’s Word, as you live in the church?

      But there is another reason.  The other reason is that Jonah’s commission to Nineveh, to the wicked country of Assyria, displays the sovereignty of God’s mercy.  We are going to see that this was Jonah’s problem:  that God would show mercy to such people!  Jonah was infected with the attitude of his day.  The people of God had become smug.  They thought that they were the people of God and that the other nations simply did not deserve any mercy because they were so desperately wicked.  When Israel was spiritual, when Israel understood that their own salvation was entirely of God, then they had no problem with the spread of that Word to the other nations.  Then, in the psalms, [Psalm 67](http://bible.gospelcom.net/bible?version=KJV&passage=Psalm+67), they could sing, “O God, let people praise thee, let all the nations sing.”  But when Israel began to think that that they were God’s special favorites, and when they would become enmeshed in their sin and would say, “But our sin doesn’t really matter.  We are the people of God.  We are not like those unbelieving Gentile dogs” — it was exactly then that God would display the sovereignty of His mercy.  He would send forth His Word once more to a people who, by His grace, would receive it.

      So the question is again to us:  Do we grow smug and complacent?  You know the gospel.  You sit in a sound, believing church.  Do you say to others, “Well, their skin is a different color than mine.  Their culture is pagan.  They beat on drums.  They don’t deserve the Word of God.”  You see, Jonah was infected by that narrow carnality which resented God showing mercy to others whom he considered undeserving.  That commission of Jonah is going to demonstrate that God is sovereign in His mercy and sends His Word to whom He will.

      That commission came to Jonah purely out of God’s sovereignty.  God speaks as the King.  “Now the word of the LORD came unto Jonah … Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before me.”

      Nineveh was a great city.  As I said, it was the capital of the world power:  Assyria.  And it was strong in every sense.  It was an evil city.  It was a city under the darkness of sin.  It was the capital of Assyria, which would destroy the kingdom of Israel.  We learn that Nineveh as a city was great in geographic size.  In [Jonah 3:3](http://bible.gospelcom.net/bible?version=KJV&passage=Jonah+3:3) we read, “Now Nineveh was an exceeding great city of three days’ journey.”  It took three days to walk through it.  It was of a great population, a minimum perhaps of two million people.  And it had a great structure.  Its walls were around the entire city.  History tells us that the walls were so wide that three or four chariots could be driven abreast on them.  It had towers.  It was the seat of the government.  What Peking is to China and what Moscow is to Russia and what Bombay is to India, so was Nineveh unto Assyria—a great city.

      But the commission is simply given:  “Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it.”  Jonah is called to do what no other prophet was ever called in the Old Testament to do.  Go to the very stronghold of the world’s darkness and tell them, “In forty days my God will destroy you.  Repent.”

      Now, Jonah’s God is our God.  In His clearly revealed Word He also speaks to us.  No, He does not speak to us in a voice out of the sky.  But He speaks to us in the Scriptures:  As a parent, arise, go, rear your children in the way of the Lord.  As a young person, arise, go forth into this world and keep yourself unspotted from the sins about you.  The sovereignty that comes to you is the same as it came to Jonah.  God’s Word comes to you, as a child of God, with utter sovereignty.  Does He tell you today something you must do?  You must confess your sin to someone you have sinned against.  You have to apologize.  You have to talk to your wife or your teenager.  He presses upon you your biblical duties.  The Word of the Lord came:  Arise, go, and cry against Nineveh.

      There is a special application there to the church in our activities of evangelism.  As the call of the Word of God is to spread the Word of God as a congregation and as churches in unity, to send forth that Word of God also through the means of sending out missionaries, preachers of the gospel, do not drag your feet.  God says, “Proclaim My Word.  Go forth and preach the Word of God.  Arise, go, cry against it.”  Why?  “Because Nineveh’s wickedness is come up before me.”

      That is instructive.  What is the motivation for the church right now to proclaim the Word of God?  Is the motivation, perhaps, as some would say, because God has a desire to save all?  Is the motivation for spreading the Word of God found in a well-meant offer of God, that He is willing to save all?  Is it because God can say to all mankind, “I’ve got a wonderful plan for your life if only you would accept it”?  No!  No, to every one of those.  The motivation for the spread of the Word of God is based upon God’s uncompromising righteousness.  He is the God before whom all men stand.  He is the Judge of all the earth who takes vengeance upon the evil.

      “Jonah,” says God, “cry against Nineveh because it is worthy of judgment.  All that they have done is come up before Me.  Their wickedness is come up before Me.  Go there.  Preach to them that they are not autonomous, they are not free-spirited and independent, but that man is answerable to God and that all of his actions, thoughts, and words are judged according to the standards of the righteousness of God.  Go and cry against them and make plain to them that the great issue of their life is a holy God and their own sin.”

      Now there is another principle that is being shown to us here, and that principle is this:  Sin comes up before God.  “Their wickedness is come up before me.”  Men, in their sin, try to convince themselves that sin goes no higher than their own head, that it is a personal matter.  As long as no one else is hurt, they say, it is my prerogative — whether that is homosexuality or living together outside of marriage, whether that is embezzlement in business or lies or swearing or whatever it may be.  That is my decision and nobody else has anything to say about it, men say.  They say that their sin is like soap bubbles.  They might float around a little bit but then they explode and it is all forgotten.  It is just a segment of their life; they can go on.  But God says to man, He says to you and to me, “I know your secret thought.”  Because your sin is not immediately judged, you think that perhaps the almighty God in heaven is like you, tolerant, and He is going to forget.  But it is not so.  “I will reprove you,” says God.  “And I will show your sins before you.”

      “Jonah, I am the God of all the earth.  Every man is Mine and answerable and exposed to My righteousness.  I am as acquainted with every deed of every man as I am with the deeds of My people.  The eyes of the Lord are in every place.  It is all before Me.  I am the judge of every man, woman, and child or teenager.  Now, go to Nineveh — that place where the measure of sin is filled up and it comes up before Me.  And preach My Word.”

      The righteous God gave Jonah a commission to proclaim His Word in the midst of a sinful world.  The application?  That Word comes to you and me, too.  We, too, think that we can stamp out our sin so that it leaves no trace.  But God says, “I know your sins.”  Do not think that God is as you are.  Your sins are known to God.  God is not a private God, confined to a church within four walls on Sunday so that we honor Him then, and the rest of the week we do as we want behind our computer screen on the Internet, or working in the kitchen, or painting, or driving, or whatever we do.  Our lives and our hearts and our words come up before God.  And, therefore, we are called to confess our sins and forsake them.

      There is a profound word to our nation.  We must cry out to our nation.  The pride of our nation must sicken God — the murder of millions of the unborn, gay parades, militant feminism, smug arrogance (also in the church) against God’s Word, public blasphemy.  We have warrant today from God’s own Word to cry out:  “Your sins are known to God.  They come up before Him and they cry for judgment.  Repent, or perish.”

      That might not make you the most popular person on the block.  That might not make you the most popular person in the lunchroom.  You say, as you talk to your fellow workers, “God says, one man and one woman in marriage for life.”  You say, “Sabbath is God’s day, not your day.”  God will use that word, either to soften, by His grace, or to harden.

      Pray, then, for the pure preaching of the Word of God, the preaching of the whole counsel of God, without compromise.  Pray for present-day Jonahs on the pulpit, Jonahs on the mission field, men sent of the church who will proclaim that God is God.  He is the living God of all the earth.  You have one and only one need:  Bow down before Him and know Him in Jesus Christ the Lord.

      By faith, we look to this sovereign God of our salvation for grace to obey and to trust and to rest in Him for our strength.

      Be sure to join us next week as we will continue in this amazing book of Jonah.

      Let us pray.

      Father, bless Thy Word to our hearts.  Cause us to be humbled before it.  In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.