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| **THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR**  **"God's Rebuke of a Pouting Prophet” Rev. Carl Haak September 18, 2011; No. 3585** |

Dear radio friends,

    In our broadcast last Sunday, we saw Jonah’s response to God’s sovereign mercy.  God had shown sovereign mercy to His children in Nineveh.  And we learned that Jonah’s response to that was that it displeased Jonah exceedingly and he was very angry.

      Today we want to see the Lord’s dealings with His prophet.  We will look, then, at God’s rebuke of a pouting prophet.   Our text will be [Jonah 4:6-11](http://bible.gospelcom.net/bible?version=KJV&passage=Jonah+4:6-11).

      What must strike into our hearts as we come to these words of God is the amazing mercy of God toward Jonah.  God maintains covenant friendship with Jonah.  In His faithfulness, He takes the initiative and once again goes to restore the man of God to repentance and spiritual sanity.  God will put his feet back into the path of obedience, even though Jonah again willfully has wandered from that path.  Therein we see the blessed gospel to ourselves.

      When God comes to rebuke His pouting prophet, we see in the narrative that God uses the means of questions (vv. 4, 9, and 11), which He places before Jonah.  God’s questions are some of the strongest means to arrest us in our sinful-self rebellion.  God does not always come to us in our anger, in our sin, with thunder and lightning.  Sometimes He comes to us in the silent night or in a lonely booth, as was the case with Jonah.  He comes to us in the quiet, when all the fires are burning within our hearts.  And He comes to us with a question calculated to derail us from our unholy anger and to trigger some sober, spiritual thinking.  God often does this.  With Adam and Eve, “Where art thou, Adam?”  With Elijah, “What doest thou here, Elijah?”  With the disciples, “Why are ye so troubled?”

      God comes first to Jonah, in verse 4, as he has made his booth and is looking over the city of Nineveh, a city that has been brought to repentance by the sovereign grace of God.  God comes to His prophet, who is sitting in that booth, with a probing question:  “Doest thou well to be angry?”  Literally, “Is thy anger a righteous thing?”  That was a very well-framed question.  A well-framed question from life can have tremendous influence on a distraught spirit.  When all of our reasoning seems to go nowhere and all of our words seem ineffectual, a question may be like the reins pulled on a galloping horse — bringing us up short.  So God with Jonah.

      God comes to Jonah and does not debate with Jonah whether or not he is angry.  But He asks him the question, “Do you think you have the *right* to be angry?  Do you have the *right* to be angry with how I will dispense My mercy?”

      Is this true of you, today?  Does God speak to you in this way?  Are *you* in a state contrary to the will of God?  Are you angry, resentful, bitter against another person?  Are you upset with the way the will of God has been seen in your life?  You will not begin to get untangled from that spirit of resentment and anger until God puts some probing questions in your heart.  What is the root of this resentment?  Do you think you have the right to be this way, to be angry?  What is the root of your jealousy against another?  What is the root of your suspicion against So-and-so?  This attitude of animosity and friction, this attitude within you that is so contrary to My word, do you have the *right*to that attitude?

      It seems that when you and I are carried away in some carnal, sinful attitude, we appear almost powerless before it until God stops us, and all alone He asks us a simple question:  “Do you have the *right* to feel the way you do in Mypresence?”

      But then God continued.  We read that God prepared a gourd, which grew up quickly.  In verse 6 we read, “And the LORD God prepared a gourd, and made it to come up over Jonah, that it might be a shadow over his head, to deliver him from his grief.  So Jonah was exceeding glad of the gourd.”  God prepared a quick-growing plant.  And it grew even faster — it came up over night.  Evidently it was a plant in the squash family with big fan-shaped leaves that could shade Jonah’s head.  There was mercy in that.  Jonah had no business being out in that booth.  He had made himself look silly in his pouting and sulking over what God had done.  And the booth was inadequate to shield him from the sun.  So God provides shade.  And Jonah, we read, was glad.  He was delighted because of the gourd.  That is the very first time in the book of Jonah that we read that Jonah is glad about something.  He is very happy about it — just like you are on a hot day when someone gives you a cold drink.  Your soul rejoices.  Not only does it feel good as you drink it down, but you are glad, you are refreshed in your spirit.  Jonah was glad.

      “But God prepared a worm when the morning rose the next day, and it smote the gourd that it withered.”  This was some type of cut-worm.  Its path was directed by the Lord God and it was given a voracious appetite.  In one day the gourd was withered.  This is like a zucchini in the summer—great big fan leaves.  But just one little cut-worm at the root, and in less than an hour that great plant is bowed over and shriveled.

      And to add insult to injury, from Jonah’s perspective, God sent a sultry east wind and made the sun beat down on Jonah’s head.  We read, “And it came to pass, when the sun did arise, that God prepared a vehement east wind; and the sun beat upon the head of Jonah, that he fainted, and wished in himself to die, and said, It is better for me to die than to live.”  Not only did he lose his shade, but a hot wind came.  Thus was Jonah given intense physical annoyance, to such a point that he whispers under his breath, “I wish I were dead.”  Jonah is brought, then, to a place where his misery outside of him, his physical misery, matches his misery within.  He is the prophet who went out to pout because God’s ways displeased him — to sulk.  He had first been glad over a gourd that gave him physical relief.  Now he is plunged down to despair and he would rather die than live.

      Then God comes with another question:  “Doest thou well to be angry for the gourd?”  The idea is this:  Jonah, you so quickly and so intensely developed a love for that gourd.  So vehemently, Jonah, did you value it because it brought you pleasure and relief.  And now you cannot bear the lack of it.  Are you justified in this?  Were you so attached to the gourd, which brought you a little comfort, and now so vexed and so anguished and so angry in its loss?

      Jonah answered the Lord.  He said, “I do well to be angry, even unto death.”  Yes, I believe my anger is justified.  I wanted that gourd.  It was at least something that brought me a little cheer.  Jonah had been sitting there grumbling against God, pouting over what God had done, not doing what he had wanted.  At least he had that little gourd, which provided him some pleasure.  Now that is gone, too.  Yes!  I have a right to be angry!  I have a right to be angry over *big* things, God’s will to choose out of Nineveh His church.  And I have the right to be angry over *little* things, the dying of a plant that I happened to like.

      Does that sound familiar to you?  Are you angry with God, unhappy with major things, believing that He is doing all wrong?  Then do you get angry over the least little thing that upsets you and takes away your pleasure — a broken shoe-lace, the child who gummed up your computer, the wife who broke off the side-mirror of your car on the garage door, a curling iron that burns you?  You can get angry over everything!

      So Jonah, is this the way it is, that whatever pleases you, you believe ought to be left in place?  And whatever does not please you, whether it is big or small, you believe has no right ever to happen?  Is that the case, Jonah?  Do you have the right to be angry that way?  And his answer was, “Yes, I do well to be angry, even unto death.”

      Now, having gotten it out of him, the Lord corrects him.  And He does so again in the form of a question.  “Then said the Lord, Thou hast had pity on the gourd, for the which thou hast not laboured, neither madest it grow; which came up in a night, and perished in a night:  and should not I spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than six score thousand (120,000) persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle?”

      What is God saying?  He is leaving Jonah with a question to answer.  Jonah, your affection so readily became all wound up with a gourd, with a plant, something you welcomed and loved and you found pleasure in.  You did not make it.  It was brief-lived.  But you had your affections twined around it because it pleased your fancy.  Now, may not I, out of My eternal grace, raise up a people out of wicked Nineveh, the workmanship of My own hands, save them, and for their sakes spare the city?  Will you keep Me from My pleasure, Jonah?

      Jonah, answer that question.  It is time to get down off that high horse you have been riding.  You have shown a regard for a plant, a gourd.  Now think of your relationship to that plant.  You did not make it.  You did not sustain it.  You did not labor for it.  You did not make it grow.  You responded with the whole of your personality to that gourd.  So attached were you to the gourd that when it was taken away from you, you were angry unto death.  You had pity for the gourd.  It brought you delight because it sheltered you.  And now that it is gone, you think that you have the right to be angry.

      Now, Jonah, says Jehovah to him, I am God.  I have willed in mercy to fashion a body   in Jesus Christ out of the dunghill of human depravity, wretched sinners.  And some of those sinners are people you do not like.  Some of them are inNineveh.  There are more than a hundred and twenty thousand little children there who are now under the influence of believing parents.  And not only that, if that does not get your heart—it should!—there are also much cattle there.  Plants are wonderful creatures.  But cattle are even greater works of My hand.  Jonah, you showed more pity for a plant because it served you, than you show zeal and love for Me in the accomplishment of My saving purposes.  Is that right, Jonah?  Doest thou well to be angry?

      I am not surprised that the book of Jonah ends right there.  How can you answer that except in sobs of repentance?  There is where I believe Jonah was found after verse 11, with Peter.  The Bible draws a veil.  But Jonah has been confronted by his God, with his narrow, sinful heart, and his self-serving, selfish, sinful will.  Jonah has been shown that he puts *his* desires, *his* wants, *his*opinions, *his* comforts, *his* pleasures before God.  That is what he did.  And without any further dialogue, with no excuses and no response, the book ends.

      But I believe that we hear Jonah’s sobs of repentance.  For he saw how far his heart could be from God.

      Jonah did not want God to have mercy on whom He will have mercy.  He did not want God’s pleasure to be done.  He did not want what pleased God.  He wanted what pleased himself.  But God says to Jonah, and to you and me, “I am God.  And I will not only show you your pride, but I will make you desire, with all your heart, that My pleasure be done.”

      The application is, first of all, that we must see God’s determination that we acquiesce, that we submit to His will.  It was God’s will to draw out of Nineveh His people.  So He sent Jonah there and made Jonah’s preaching effective.  And He spared Nineveh.  He rejoiced over His mercy to bring out of darkness His own elect in Jesus Christ.  For Jonah to go and preach in Nineveh certainly took much courage.  But God is saying, “Jonah, it’s not just courage that I want.  I want you to rejoice in that in which I rejoice.  I want My pleasure to be your pleasure.  You will be brought to the point where you rejoice when you see My pleasure done—whether that pleasure is something agreeable to you or not, whether My will cuts against your will or not.  I call you to submit and to will My will.”

      Jonah is being taught to delight himself in the Lord his God.

      Now where are you today in all of this?  Is there anything in which you, like Jonah, are unreconciled to the will of a sovereign God?  And when He questions you tenderly:  “Doest thou well to be angry?” do you walk off and pout?  Beware.  God’s will, as it comes to you in His Word and as it comes to you in the ordering of your life, is very dear to Him.  It may be unwelcome to you, but it comes according to the counsel of His own will and according to His own good pleasure.  In the child  of God’s life, nothing happens by chance, but by the good pleasure of God.  And God says, “Not only must you *say* that, but My will must be precious to you.  You must embrace it.  Your pleasure must be My pleasure.”

      God may teach you these truths in a very practical way, as He did Jonah with his gourd.  God may send into your life a lovely, serviceable, pleasant gourd — something that shields the sun from your head and gives you relief — a husband, a wife, a child, health, possessions and a home, job, friends and family, the esteem of other, success and skills.  And your heart will seek to intertwine with your gourd.  Your gourd will bring you joy.  It will take away the weariness of this life and be welcomed by you.  That child, that wife, that husband, that job, that friend—are you more glad for your gourd than for God?  God planted it.  God watered it.  And God may take it from you — in order to write the truth of these words on your heart:  “Though my flesh and my heart faileth, God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.”  Do you put something higher than God?  Do you put your own will and your own pleasure higher than God?

      Now behold the mercies and compassion of God.  The essence of holiness in our life is to be like God.  We see in Jonah, and in ourselves, the wickedness of being unlike our God.  We can be so distant from God in our thoughts, our hearts, our emotions.  And we can show ourselves to be so contrary and so far from what God desires.

      Yet God showed mercy to Jonah.  He brought Jonah to repentance.  God is telling us that when we receive His mercy, that will also make us merciful.  Compassion received makes one compassionate to the undeserving.  Do you say to your enemies, “They upset me.  They said bad things about me.  They deserve the anger of God.”  Or do you say, “Lord, honor Thy name, judge those who rise up against Thee, but give me, for Thy sake, to have compassion on my enemies and to pray for those who despitefully use me.  Send forth the gospel trumpet, Lord.  Gather Thy church from all nations to the glory of Thy name.  Gather Thy church from among those whom my flesh would count as enemies, and make me compassionate toward my brothers and sisters.  May the largeness of Thy mercy toward me, who am by nature narrow-hearted, make me compassionate.  Open my corroded spiritual arteries by Thy mercy and give me pity and mercy toward those in Thy kingdom who have offended me and sinned against me and conduct themselves in a way that is irksome to me.”

      God’s mercy makes us merciful.

      We leave Jonah, now.  Next week we will have one more message on him, the Lord’s words spoken about Jonah in [Matthew 12](http://bible.gospelcom.net/bible?version=KJV&passage=Matthew+12).   But, for now, we leave Jonah.  We will meet him one day in heaven.  May Jonah be a reminder to you and to me of one great truth:  Those who receive God’s mercy will show mercy.  Those who receive mercy from God will now find one thing most delightful:  that God’s good pleasure is always done.

      Let us pray. Father, we thank Thee for Thy Word.  We would ask for the Holy Spirit to write it upon our hearts.  We pray through Jesus Christ, Amen.