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| **THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR****"The Second Time”****Rev. Carl Haak**haak@prca.org**August 14, 2011; No. 3580**(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 our study of the book of Jonah we have come to the third chapter, the first four verses.  If you have your Bible handy, open the Word of God with me and read these verses.

      Chapter three is the high point in the remarkable book of Jonah.  How amazing the story of chapters one and two:  of the disobedient prophet Jonah, who ran from the presence of the Lord when he was told to go to Nineveh; of the stormy sea and of the ship; of being cast overboard and swallowed by a whale; of three days spent in the belly of the great fish and now spit out on the shore — all of it is the prelude to the wonder of chapter three.  For in chapter three of the book of Jonah we have the power of the word of God, energized through God’s elective grace, to bring unto Himself those whom He chose in Christ.  Jonah goes to Nineveh, that great and wicked city, ripe for judgment.  And great portions of it are brought to repentance before God — a foretelling of the glorious gospel in the New Testament, gathering the church out of darkness into the light of Christ.

      That is very applicable to us.  In a day when the church is choosing marketing techniques over the Word of God; in a day when the church is rejecting the preaching of the gospel; in a day when churches deny inspiration, they hem and they haw over whether or not the Bible is word-for-word the Word of God; and in a day when the church begins to concoct its own methods to expand the church and her witness — in that day, I say, we are not left in doubt.  Read [Jonah 3](http://bible.gospelcom.net/bible?version=KJV&passage=Jonah+3).   It is the power of the Word of God spoken exactly as God has given it in the Scriptures.  It is the power of God unto salvation.  God said to Jonah, “Preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee.”

      Let that characterize us today.  No matter what, church of Jesus Christ, let us preach the Word of God faithfully.  Let us witness of the living Word of God.  And let us believe what we read in the Scriptures (Jeremiah), “Is not my word like a hammer?”  Nevertheless (Isaiah), “the word of God shall not return void but shall accomplish the purpose to which God sends it.”

      Chapter three is also the highlight in the life of Jonah.  What a wonderful part of his life.  Here we see him acting consistent with the grace of God within him.  In chapter one we saw a disobedient child of God and we saw a mass of hopeless contradictions.  We saw a child of God who had to say to pagan sailors, “I fear God, but I’m running from Him.  I’m a Hebrew, but I don’t want God’s presence.  He’s the God of heaven, but I take it upon myself to disobey Him.”

      Now Jonah is standing in the beauty of obedience.  That is certainly applicable to us.  The beauty of obedience.  Do you obey God?  Do you call yourself a Christian?  Do you call yourself His child?  Do you obey your parents?  Do you forgive your wife/husband/one another?  Do you speak no evil?  Do you lay up treasures in heaven?  Are you separate from a world of sin?  Do you confess your sins before God?  Nothing so glorifies God as the immediate and explicit obedience of His children.  And that is what we are going to see in Jonah today.  What about you?  The Word of God calls you, as a young man, as a wife, as a child, calls you to obedience.  Do you obey?

      The Word of the Lord, we read, came to Jonah the second time.  That is very beautiful, too, because it certainly tells us that God’s Word is going to have its own way in our lives.  We cannot escape, suppress, ignore, or erase God’s Word.  You cannot do that if you are a child of God.  That is a sobering, but comforting, truth.  God’s Word tracks us right down, follows us, and turns us right back to the place of our disobedience and comes to us the second time.

      How many times did you disobey Him, set His Word aside, run away like Jonah?  Does God disown you as His child?  No.  He disciplines you.  But the Word of God comes the second time:  “Jonah, arise, go to Nineveh.”  That is God’s grace.

      Imagine, for a moment, how Jonah must have felt.  Had he not permanently disqualified himself as a prophet?  For a period of time that only afterwards Jonah could determine to have been three days (how does one tell time in a whale’s belly, in the pitch dark, in dampness and slime?), after that he has been spit back upon the dry land.  He felt the internal wrenching of the fish.  He is hurled skyward over the water.  And he lands on a sandy (or perhaps, stony) shoreline.  His eyes and face are shriveled from the darkness.  He tries to get his balance.  His clothes and skin are covered with slime and stench.  He asks the question, “Where am I?”  And he reflects on the unusual providence of God that spared his life.  The last sight he saw was the heaving, angry sea.  Now he is on the dry land again.  What was he to do, where was he to go?  Where was he?  He was in a bewildered state.  He could not go back to Israel and be a prophet.  And would it not be presumptuous to think that he still was a prophet after such disobedience?

      So we read, “The word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time, saying, Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee.”  Do you see the grace of God?  It would have been grace to preserve the prophet.  It would have been grace to send him back to Israel and say to him, “You should be amazed that you are not dead.”  But God reissues the commission.  God sent him back.  What would we have done?

      Here is a man who has gone one hundred eighty degrees in the wrong direction.  Here is a man who was entrusted with the honor of God to bear God’s Word and to do God’s will.  He had been given a calling, clear and explicit.  And he flatly refused.  Jonah became so determined in his disobedience that he declared that he would rather die than do his calling.  “Throw me overboard,” he had said to the sailors.  Now, having preserved his life, we would have said, “All right, Jonah, go home.  We’re glad you repented, but you can’t be of further use to God.  Your calling is revoked.”  But that is not God’s way.  God brings the same commission.  He restores, in the way of repentance, and He reaffirms the calling.

      You ask me, “Pastor, is God really like that?  To those who have turned a deaf ear to His Word and pursued their own way of folly, and have been restored by grace alone and reinstated in repentance, is God truly that merciful?”  Yes, He is like that.  If He were not like that, no one could ever serve Him.

      We have a commission from God as a husband and father.  We disqualify ourselves, we turn to our own way.  In anger, we want our own ease, in selfishness we turn from our calling.  God humbles us, and what does He say?  “Now go.  Return to your calling.”  Have we not in our own sins taken matters into our own hands?  Have we not denied Him who has called us to confess Him?  Have we not all, as Jonah, turned from a clear path or calling before God?  Of course we have.  That is our sin.  And God?  God disciplines.  God chastens.  God corrects.  God breaks you and He brings you low.  He does not play around with you in the way of sin.  He does not gently step around the issues of your disobedience.  He does not play a game.

      Then, when you come through the fish’s belly and you have been spit out, what word does God bring to you?  Does He say, “You’d better just be thankful that you’re forgiven.  But I’m not going to use *you* anymore”?  Oh, no.  The unmerited grace of:  “Jonah, I’ll tell you the second time now.  Go and do what I told you to do.”  That was utterly gracious.

      Would you notice with me also that when the Word of God came to him the second time, it was the same word?  There was no alteration, no smoothing of the rough edges, no rephrasing of the commission in words that might be more palatable to Jonah.  After all, Jonah, when that call came to him the first time, found that call so contrary to his desires, it so rubbed him, it so gnawed at him that he rejected it.  Well, would it not be wiser this second time to modify the words a little bit and to put it more softly, with a little bit more explanation?  No.  It comes the same way, the same words.  You see, we are like children.  Sometimes, as children, we are told what we do not want to do and we throw a tantrum, thinking that our tantrum will get our parents, if not to change, at least to tone it down a little bit.  We think that we can soften the command by a tantrum.  A wise parent will not accommodate such a child.  A wise parent will come back with the same command.  So does God.

      God says, “Husband, love your wife.”  God is not going to adjust that for your situation.  You say to Him, “But she’s so ….”  And then you go through this violent time of upheaval in your marriage and you finally come to repentance.  And you say, “Well, OK, OK, I’ll try to bear with her a little bit.  I’ll live in another room.”  Oh, no.  The word of God comes to you the second time and says, “Man, love your wife.”

      God says to you, “Seek the things that are above.  Watch over the Sabbath day.  You are not to labor on the Sabbath day.”  You say, “Well, alright, I’ll remember the Lord’s day from 9:30 on Sunday morning till 11:47.  But then I need some time for myself … for my work … for my pleasures.”  Oh, no!  God does not adjust His commands.  Let us learn to obey the first time.  Let us learn that if we try to run away from God, sooner or later He is going to deal with us.  And we are going to have to face the very command that we tried to run from.  God is gracious.

      But yet, there is a slight difference in this second commission.  In the first commission God said to Jonah, “Cry against Nineveh, for their wickedness is come up before me.”  In the second one God says to Jonah, “Preach unto Nineveh the preaching that I bid thee.”  The emphasis of the first commission was the great wickedness of Nineveh.  The emphasis of the second commission was that the preaching, as to its content, must be exactly what I tell you.  “Jonah, the content of your message must be exactly what I give to you.  You must not think this message up.  You must not consult yourself.  But you must faithfully deliver exactly what I have told you to deliver.”  That is the heart of all true preaching in the church.  True preaching in the church is to convey what God has said in His Word—the exposition of the Word of God, what Paul calls in [Acts 20](http://bible.gospelcom.net/bible?version=KJV&passage=Acts+20) the whole counsel of God.  Thousands of clergy preach on Sunday.  But do they preach what God has given them?

      Arrogance has created the notion that God’s Word is unsophisticated.  It is irrelevant, it is erroneous, it is time-bound, it is something that a minister has to apologize for.  It conveys notions and prejudices against women and other things, they say.  Then, not only is the content of the Bible put under question, but also the preaching of the Bible, the authoritative declaration.  Oh, no, says man.  What we want is some sharing.  We want some analysis.  We want some dialogue.  Would to God the church-world would insist on preaching.  Prophets, ministers are to come with the Word of God and to preach the preaching that God bids.  A prophet in the Old Testament did not come to God’s people and say, “Well, I believe, by the cultivation of my inner life (my spiritual life), I have come to a heightened sense of spiritual awareness.  Will you come with me and will you listen as I share with you something of the fruits of my spiritual sensitivity?”  Not on your life would a prophet try that.  Preach the preaching that I bid thee!  The minister is to take the Word of God as he finds that Word, exactly as he finds it, and to press it down upon the conscience of God’s people, to explain it clearly, to set it forth in the light of all the Scriptures, and to preach the Word of God.

      Jonah, we read, arose.  And he went to Nineveh according to the word of the Lord.

      The thing that stands out is that Jonah now renders immediate and explicit obedience.  Previously the only thing that he did that God told him to do was to arise.  He did arise.  But he went the wrong way.  Now it is different.  He arose and he went to Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord.

      Now there is a great principle of faith here.  That principle is that the fruit of God’s chastenings in our life, and His corrections, will also be seen in how we regulate our lives.  Nothing weighed with Jonah anymore, nothing moved him anymore but the Word of God.  He had fled from the presence of God in his stubbornness.  He had boarded a ship to Tarshish according to his own cunning.  He had sought to escape according to his own reasons.  But now he goes to Nineveh.

      Why would he go to Nin-eveh?  Because he makes his conscious determination by the Word of God.  He answers all objections with the Word of God.  He looks to nothing but the Word of God.  What about the difficulties?  What about the impossibilities?  What about the fears?  No, Jonah will obey the Word of God.  He will resign his own wisdom.  He will refuse to be governed by the things he sees.  He will simply bring the Word of God.  That is the principle.  The fruit of chastisement is that now you and I are afraid to depart from the Word of God and we will place all in dependence upon that Word.  That is repentance.  Repentance is not just that our emotions and our feelings are stirred.  True repentance is that now we are resolved to obey the Word of God.

      Do we do that perfectly?  No.  Do we always obey God for the right motives?  No.  Jonah is not going to do that either.  But Jonah knew what the Word of God called him to do.  He knew that the Word of God was to be obeyed and was right.  And as a repentant child of God, he was determined that he was going to follow the Word of God.  He must go the way of God’s Word.

      That was a very demanding call that God gave to Jonah.  Obedience was not going to be easy.

      The Scriptures emphasize to us the greatness of the city.  “Now Nineveh was an exceeding great city of three days’ journey.”  It was a great metropolitan area, as great as Chicago or Los Angeles or New York.  It took three days’ journey.  A day’s journey is fifteen miles.  Forty-five miles across!  And Jonah, as he is fresh from the fish’s belly, must journey east over deserts and up plains and over rivers that stand between him and Nineveh.  And he must come before Nineveh, which is the seat of a cruel, mighty Assyrian empire, heartless and ruthless in war, engaging the world in conquest.  It was heathen.  It was worshiping idols.  It was warlike.

      And he must bring a message.  “Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown.”  He did not appear on the streets of Nineveh with the message “God loves you and He has a wonderful plan for your life.”  No.  But  this:  “The living God says to you in your sin, forty days and you will be overthrown in your rebellion against God.”

      You talk about a demanding mission!  Think of it.  Here he enters into a city filled with warlike aggression.  Perhaps he hears the beating of drums.  He is one man, he is no army.  He does not have a forty-four strapped on his side.  But he proclaims God’s Word.  Jonah preached the preaching that God had bidden him.  He preached it to a society that, in its very framework, warp and woof, said “Do your own thing.  You may be a god to yourself.  We are accountable to no one.  We have the right to our own life-style.”  In that day Jonah preached, “You are accountable to God.  God sees you and God will judge you.  And God holds you before Him in His hand.  He sits on His throne in the heavens.  You are to repent or perish!”

      That was a very demanding mission.  Surely Jonah could say with the apostle Paul, “And who is sufficient for these things?”  But he obeyed.  If ever a man would feel the foolishness of preaching, it would have been Jonah.  But he had come to know the power of God’s Word in his own soul.  And that is our calling as a church.  That is the calling of the minister of your church.  The calling of your minister is to preach the preaching that God bids him in His Word.  How humbling to man.

      To Nineveh, the capital of the world, whom did God send?  Did He send a man in a chariot, dressed in gold and jewels?  No.  Did He send a man in human strength?  No.  This was a man who just came from a fish’s belly.  He was taken from the dead.  Well, did He give this man, perhaps, some miracles to flash around?  No.  He gave him His Word and said to Jonah, “Jonah, preach what I tell you.”  To Nineveh, a society that was enamored with human might and human glamour, God sends a man vomited from a fish’s belly.  And He puts His Word into Jonah’s mouth.  Jonah proclaimed the power of the Word of God.  Verily, he that heareth the Word of God has passed from death to life.  My sheep hear Myvoice.  Faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the Word of God.  God has spoken by His Son in the holy Scriptures.  Repent and believe in Him.

      Father in heaven, bless Thy Word to our hearts.  Through Jesus we pray, Amen.