

* **Arise, Go, Cry Against It**

Jonah 1:1, 2

* **The Prophet Who Ran Away**

Jonah 1:3

* **The God Who Would Not Let Go**

Jonah 1:4-17

* **Prayer from a Whale's Belly**

Jonah 2

* * * *

Rev. Carl Haak

Pastor of
Georgetown Protestant Reformed Church
in Hudsonville, Michigan

July 6, 2014 — No. 3726

July 27, 2014 — No. 3730

THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR

July 6, 2014

No. 3731

Arise, Go, Cry Against It

Rev. Carl Haak

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 that 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." Rather, 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 as 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: 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, that 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 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 Zebulun. 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

Jonah was brought down in his prayer to confess his sin. Verse 8, he prays, “They that observe lying vanities forsake their own mercy.” A lying vanity is an idol, anything that turns you from God. Whatever takes the place of God is a lying vanity. Jonah had observed the lying vanity. That lying vanity was his own will. He said “No” to God. He said that his own thoughts and desires were better than God’s. Jonah made his own god. “I will do as I want.” He lifted himself over the Word of God and he forsook his own mercy. Mercy here is the personification of God, the God of mercy. Instead of serving the merciful God, Jonah decided he would observe a lying vanity. Jonah says that, not to excuse but to confess, to acknowledge his sin.

Then Jonah goes on in verse 9: “Salvation is of the Lord.” I will pay my vows unto the Lord. I vowed to be a prophet. I vowed to go where He would send me. I will pay that vow. I will go back, the Lord being merciful to me, I will go back and go to Nineveh. For salvation is of the Lord.

That brought comfort. The taking of a soul from guilt and bondage and forgiving that soul and freeing that soul from the bondage of sin is the work of

God. Salvation is of the Lord. When you are in a fish’s belly, that much is clear. Salvation is of the Lord.

That must be clear to you today personally. All of our belonging to God and all of our having God as our Father and as the Almighty One who cares for us in Jesus Christ, that was not due to anything of ourselves—not our will, not our work. We do not take the credit for that. Oh, you might take the credit today if you are standing on your own two feet in pride. But not if you are in the belly of a fish with the slime and ooze of your folly and your sin around you. From the depths, when the waves and billows have gone over our soul, then we know one thing for sure: Salvation is of the Lord.

Why did God restore Jonah? Because He would have Jonah first confess, “My salvation is of Thee, Lord.” That is why the Lord does not let you go but restores you to repentance.

Let us pray.

Father, we thank Thee for Thy holy Word and we ask again that Thou wilt write it upon the pages of our hearts. We pray in the name of our Redeemer, Jesus Christ, Amen.

take up Jonah and cast him into the sea?" Yes, it was. But Jonah sees beyond men. "It was Thou, O God." Faith sees to the cause—God's hand. That, too, is repentance. If God sees fit to chasten me and lead me down, it was God's hand that did that, not fate. Jonah recognizes that God's hand had caught him in his disobedience and he submits to God. Now what happens to you when God begins to affect your life, when He begins to deal with you because of your sins? And the wind begins to blow and He begins to shake your life all around you? Do you say, "Oh, things are not very good at home. Things are not very good with my husband/wife/children"? Do you say, "Oh, my problem is those people in the church, or those elders, or that church, or my problem is the economy or ..."? Oh, may God stop our stubborn, self-loving flesh and bring us to the point where we say, "Thy hand, O God, is upon me." May we acknowledge the living God as the creator and understand that God brings us back to repentance.

By faith, Jonah recognizes God's goodness in afflicting him. He says, "God is bringing me up from corruption" (v. 6). He says that he will "sacrifice unto God with a voice of thanksgiving" (v. 9). He even sees God's goodness to him in the fish's belly. Chapter 1:12, he said, "I know that for my sake this great tempest is

upon you." He understands that although he deserved death, yet God had preserved his life.

So he makes use of God's Word as he prays. Jonah quoted no fewer than seven times from the psalms in his prayer. Some of them were verbatim. The references were these: Psalm 130, Psalm 42, Psalm 31, Psalm 18, and Psalm 116. Jonah is using various verses from the psalms mingled into his own prayer—because no book of the Bible so expresses the life of the child of God as the Psalms. The Psalms are the written, spiritual biography of the work of God's grace. Jonah, who was a prophet, and had been a mouthpiece of God, nevertheless, when it comes to prayer, he begins to piece together the beautiful litany of the Psalms applied to his situation.

You have the Bible, do you not? Do the Scriptures form your prayers? How did Jonah have the Bible? Did he have it on a scroll? No. Did he have a candle? Could he light a candle in a fish's belly? No. How did he know? He knew it, he had meditated upon it, he had learned it, it was in his heart.

What about you? You have God's Word. Do you store up God's Word? Do you store that Word up for days of trial? Do you read it regularly day by day? And in your prayers, does God's Word come out from your lips?

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.

Second, Jonah had witnessed an unusual display of God's mercy toward the remnant of grace that were 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. 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?

*The Word of God
leaves those who reject it.*

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 comes 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, view themselves 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

*Jonah's commission to Nineveh,
to the wicked country of Assyria,
displays the sovereignty
of God's mercy.*

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, 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

remembered the LORD: and my prayer came in unto thee, into thine holy temple." He sees his prayer as a messenger that runs from a fish's belly to God's throne.

Does that apply also to you and me? The greatest cost of the sin of a backslidden Christian is that he has forfeited the experience of communion with God. True repentance is a desire for the restoration of fellowship with God. The words of the prodigal son, "I will arise and go to my father. And I will say [what was he going to say? Do you remember, children? Was he going to say to his father, 'I missed the well-spread table'? 'I missed my own room'? 'I missed all the things that were at home'? No, 'I will arise and go to my father and say'], father, I have sinned against thee." When you have lost God's presence in disobedience, either by a deliberate disobedience or by multiplied carelessness and God now comes to chasten you, what happens? By grace, you cry out, "I must have God!" True repentance is

evidence that the child of God wants the greatest treasure: communion with God.

You see, a Christian is not simply someone whose sins are forgiven and now he is off on his own so that he has comfort as he continues in his life of greed or lust or whatever it may be. If that is the way you view a Christian, then you smear the cross of Jesus Christ. Jesus died in order that we might have the treasure of Father's house and fellowship. When God restores you in repentance, when He brings the pincers of affliction into your life, His purpose is to restore you to fellowship, to have you treasure what you took so lightly, namely, the presence of God.

But then we see also the working of faith in Jonah's prayer. Jonah begins to acknowledge the hand of God. He sees that it was God who had cast him into the deep. We would say,

*When God restores you
in repentance,
when He brings the pincers
of affliction into your life,
His purpose is to restore you
to fellowship,
to have you treasure
what you took so lightly,
namely, the presence of God.*

that is the way Jonah prays in verses 2 and 3 of chapter 2. Now we might say when we read that, "I thought the pagan sailors cast him into the sea. Didn't they

book. Chastisement tells you what God has put in the heart of His child.

Here is Jonah. Up to this point in the book we see very little of the work of God in him. We might even say, "How can he be a child of God, that disobedient man?" But affliction shows the true Jonah. When Jonah is down in the depths of the sea in the fish's belly, you find out what God put down deep into him.

What does affliction do to you? In some children of God even the heaviest chastisement seems to produce no spiritual good. God corrects and they become bitter, resentful, angry. No sanctified spirit. But here we see that God's chastisement is having its intended effect. The spell of Jonah's sin is broken, shattered. And in a humble and broken spirit, he cries to God to restore him in mercy.

What was the primary concern of Jonah's prayer? We might answer that according to our own thinking: "Get me out." Was Jonah's primary concern simply to get out? No. Jonah's primary concern in his prayer was not deliverance but a return to what he had so foolishly despised. He had despised God's presence. Now, in the belly of the fish, it becomes his greatest treasure. In chapter 1:3 we read

that Jonah fled from the presence of the Lord. And we saw that that meant that he wanted to put away from himself everything that would remind him of Jehovah. Jonah did not believe that God was simply confined to a place on earth. But he wanted to have no dealings with God. He did not want to have his heart pricked by the Word of God. He did not want to be told that he was sinning.

Now look at his primary concern in the belly of the fish (2:4). "Then I said, I am cast out of thy sight; yet I will look again toward thy holy temple." Look to the holy temple? In disobedience he did not want to be anywhere near that holy temple. But now he looks toward that holy temple. He looks to God's presence, not simply to a building in Canaan, in Jerusalem, Solomon's temple. In a fish's belly he did not know east from west, north from south, up from down. But he says, "Here I am. And in a sense I got exactly what I wanted. I wanted to run from the presence of the Lord. I got what I wanted. But I can't stand it. I must have Him. What I despised, what I foolishly turned from, what I squandered, I see now as the treasure above everything else." Verse 7, "When my soul fainted within me I

*Affliction is the index
of the soul.*

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 the narrow carnality that resents God's showing mercy to others who are 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 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 was 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 you. No, He does not speak to you in a voice out of the sky. But He speaks to you in the Scriptures:

*Jonah was called to do
what no other prophet
was ever called
in the Old Testament
to do.*

“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.” That 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

*The motivation for
the spread of the
Word of God is based upon
God’s uncompromising
righteousness.*

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 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.

There is another principle that is being shown to us here,

up and he’s been flung over the side of a ship. The waves have poured over him. In all probability, he was not immediately swallowed but went through all that a man experiences in drowning, maybe even to the point of unconsciousness. In verses 5 and 6 of his prayer he says that the weeds of the bottom wrapped themselves around his head and he felt the ooze of the muddy bottom. He came to the roots of the mountains. Whatever a man experiences in the last moments of drowning, Jonah experienced. But he came to awareness and consciousness, coughing and sputtering. And it dawned upon him that he must be in the belly of a fish. He has air to breathe after a sort. But he smells the rotting food in the stomach of the fish. Think of the gastric juices, the stench, the darkness, the slimy, slopping around in the belly of a great fish. After a while he is aware what has happened. He has been brought down low, exceedingly low. He is at the end of the earth. Now the Scriptures focus, in Jonah 2, not so much on what went on inside the fish, but what went on inside Jonah. There is where the real miracle is taking place.

As I pointed out, back and forth Jonah prays of his misery and his faith in God. He sees all of his misery as affliction from the hand of God. He calls the fish’s belly “the belly of hell,”

not profanely but because he felt that he had been cast out of the sight of God and he would be abandoned. He who ran from God’s presence now fears that he is abandoned by God. He fears that he has had it, that God is done with him. He is in the depths of despair.

But then he says, “When my soul fainted within me, I remembered the LORD” (v. 7). There is the breaking forth of faith. He says in verse 4, “I will look again toward thy holy temple.” And in verse 7, “I remembered the LORD: and my prayer came in unto thee, into thine holy temple.”

We need to apply this for just a moment. In the belly of a fish, wretched, shocked with fear day after day after day, inwardly struggling against the demons of fear, Jonah cries out in faith to God. Does that describe you? No, you have not been in a fish’s belly—nothing so dramatic. But has God, in restoring you, brought you to a place like that? You struggle with fear that you are abandoned? You are cast off? You have only grief and misery? By faith, God’s gift to you, you cry out to God? You see, we have a great truth illumined here. We gain an accurate picture of the spiritual life of a child of God when he is under trial and severe chastisement. Affliction is the index of the soul. An index will tell you what is in the

God's purpose was to show His grace and power. As we come to this prayer, you should note with me that this is not all that Jonah prayed. He was there for three days. And he prayed without ceasing. We have here only a summary of his prayer. Secondly, you should note that the prayer is not, perhaps, organized with divisions and sub-points. When you are in distress, you pour out your heart to God. But there are two things that come out in his prayer. First of all, his great distress and overwhelming fear. "I cried... from the belly of hell.... I am cast out of thy sight...water compasses me and brings me down...my soul faints within me." Secondly, the prayer is characterized by faith in God's mercy. "He heard me." And that is before Jonah was delivered. He says, "He heard me ... I will look toward Thy holy temple... I will remember the Lord... salvation is of the Lord." Those two thoughts: Jonah's great distress, and his faith in God's mercy, leapfrog over each other until at last Jonah is restored to obedience.

"Then," we read, "Jonah prayed unto the LORD his God out of the fish's belly." It was a great fish, probably a whale or

some other large fish not known to man. We know that unbelievers jeers and howls in mockery at this. Clarence Darrow, in his great trial, said concerning a witness: "Why, a person could believe this man's testimony as easily as he could believe a fish swallowed Jonah." Well, we believe that a fish swallowed Jonah. It is a fact. A miracle, yes, but a fact. Our God, who raised Jesus from the dead, could certainly cause a great monster of the deep to come alongside a boat when His prophet is thrown overboard and swallow him. Besides, we have Jesus' word on this. When the unbelieving Sadducees and scribes asked Jesus for a sign to validate His claim as the Messiah, He responded (Matt. 12:39, 40), "An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas: 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." The reality of Jonah being swallowed by a fish, and Christ's resurrection, go together. This is reality, no myth.

Try to put yourself in Jonah's position. He's been picked

*There is no place
like a fish's belly,
under three or four hundred
feet of water,
that so calls for prayer.*

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 think that their sin is like soap bubbles. The bubbles 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 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 pro-

*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.*

claim 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.

THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR

July 27, 2014

No. 3734

Prayer from a Whale’s Belly

Rev. Carl Haak

Dear Radio Friends,

In our last message on the prophet Jonah we praised God who did not let His disobedient prophet go but was committed to restoring him to the path of obedience. We learned that Jonah tried to run from God. He did not believe God’s mercy should be shown to heathen Ninevites, the very people who were Israel’s enemies. And he challenged God’s sovereignty, he challenged God’s very right to show mercy to whom He would show mercy and to harden whom He will (Rom. 9). And in his disobedience, Jonah went down, down, and down. He tried to get away from everything that would remind him of God and of his obligations to God.

But God did not let him go. In the narrative of Jonah, chapter 1, we saw that God reveals His power to bring His child back. We saw that it was God’s initiative, that God uses the whole creation at His disposal. He brings a storm upon the ship. He controls the role of the dice to point the finger to Jonah. And He even used pagan men to begin the process of rebuke. We saw that God’s process of bringing Jonah back to

the place of obedience was first of all to wake him up to the reality of his sin; to indict him through the means of unbelieving men; and to have him acknowledge his sin and his worthiness of death.

We emphasized last week that God’s purpose was to restore Jonah to obedience, not to drown him. Jonah, even when he was cast overboard from the ship, was not in the place of full repentance. For that, God prepared a great fish to swallow him up. And there Jonah, in his misery, is brought by grace to repent and to turn fully to God.

Today we are going to look at the prayer that Jonah offered from the fish’s belly in the second chapter of Jonah—perhaps the only time in history that prayer came from that place. But any place can be a place of prayer. There is no place like a fish’s belly, under three or four hundred feet of water, that so calls for prayer. And there is no place where prayer will be more likely simply to magnify God and turn to Him alone.

Jonah was brought very low. That was the purpose of God.

in a fish's belly, back to my command. And I'm going to show you the blessing of obeying Me. You see," says God, "you're going to go back where you got off the road. That is what you have to go back to, and, by grace, in My mercy, you will begin anew."

Do you see yourself? Do you walk away from God? Do you say, No? Listen. The way of disobedience appears cheap. You can pay for it with what you have in your pockets. You have the fare. But the way back, you cannot find, you cannot buy it. It is all of God's grace.

God does not let us go. In His mercy and grace He brings

us back. He gave His Son to forgive our sins and to ransom us from all of our folly. God shows His mercy when He arrests you in your sin, when He wakes you up, stops you, indicts you, calls you: "Son, daughter, obedience to Me in love—that is the path that will bring you blessing and peace."

Let us pray.

Father in heaven, we thank Thee for Thy holy Word. We pray that it may enter into our hearts by the Holy Spirit. Defeat our proud natures and humble us to obey Thee. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR

July 13, 2014
No. 3732

The Prophet Who Ran Away
Rev. Carl Haak

Dear Radio Friends,

Continuing today our series on the prophecy of Jonah, we come to Jonah 1:3: "But Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the LORD, and went down to Joppa; and he found a ship going to Tarshish: so he paid the fare thereof, and went down into it, to go with them unto Tarshish from the presence of the LORD." The question we face as we come under this Word of God is this: Are you walking in obedience to the will of God or are you running away?

God's will for our lives is holiness, obedience, and trust. But that will of God clashes with our sinful will. At times so strong is that clash that we deliberately set aside God's will and then attempt to remove or get away from anything that would remind us of Him, whether that be in the family or in the church; whether that be as parents or as husband or wife; whether that be in prayer or in the Bible. At first it seems that everything is going to go well. But if you are God's child, it will not be long before God begins to break your life up into little pieces. The question then

is: Do you go God's way, or do you try to run as Jonah ran? If you run, as a child of God, God will trouble your life. For God is committed to doing whatever it takes. He chastens us, corrects us, and teaches us the good of obeying His will.

One of the most amazing aspects of the Bible is the untouched portraits of the saints. You know the difference between the professionally altered portrait and the untouched snapshot. Seldom would we say of a professional portrait, "I don't take a good picture." But the Bible is not a gallery of professional portraits, but of untouched snapshots. Noah, who for a hundred and twenty years built the ark out of faith ... and then became drunk and naked before his family. Abraham, the father of all the faithful, who lied to save his skin. David, a man after God's own heart, who one evening allowed lust to cripple himself and his family for the rest of his days. And we could go on and on.

In Jonah, we have here an episode probably unparalleled in the whole Bible. We have a

true prophet of God who has received a call from God, and he deliberately disobeys. God issued a clear, sovereign, righteous commission: "Jonah, arise, go to Nineveh, that great city. And cry against it, for their wickedness is come up before me." But, without one word of explanation, Jonah fled from the presence of the Lord.

We know that all that is given by God in His Word is instruction for our righteousness. So we consider today the prophet who ran away.

Now the Word of God to Jonah, as I said, was very clear. It is always very clear. Jonah, arise. That is, interrupt your normal life as a prophet in Israel. Go to Nineveh. Use whatever means of transportation is available to go to that city that everybody knows about. (He did not need to look it up on the map. It was the capital of the mighty kingdom of Assyria). And cry against it. Deliver a message of impending judgment. But Jonah rose up to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord.

If you are acquainted with Bible geography, you will remember that Nineveh is where the present-day country of Iran exists, on the converse of the Tigris and Euphrates River.

For Jonah, it was east and a little north. But Jonah, instead, went to Tarshish. Most probably Tarshish was on the far coast of Spain, beyond Gibraltar, some

|| *One of the most amazing aspects of the Bible is the untouched portraits of the saints.* ||

two thousand miles from Nineveh, in the other direction. It was one of the most distant places west then known. It was on the edge of the known world. It was as far as possible in the other direction from where God was sending him.

We can visualize it. Jonah comes out of his house in Gathhepher, in Israel. He looks down the long road east that led through the Arabian desert to the valley of the Tigris and Euphrates and ended before the gates of Nineveh. And he returned on his heels and went the other direction, west to Joppa, where he finds conveniently a ship laden for Tarshish. He pays his fare. The ship weighs anchor. There are favorable winds. The sails unfurl as billowing clouds. The shoreline recedes. He flees from the presence of the Lord!

Now, what does that mean? Does it mean that Jonah could go somewhere on earth where God was not? Could he escape? No! It does not mean that. Jonah knew the Word of God. In Jeremiah, "Do not I fill heaven

the point of full repentance on the deck of the ship. It is going to take being cast into the sea. God's purpose is to restore Jonah to obedience, not sacrifice. God's purpose in repentance was to bring Jonah back to where he went wrong. God's purpose with Jonah was not that he be drowned in the sea, but that he go to Nineveh and preach the preaching that he was told.

Repentance leads one to obedience. But even strong measures of the storm and drowning at sea did not bring Jonah to the point where he would get up and obey God. He had to go down to the belly of a fish to learn to do that.

The pagan sailors asked him, "What shall we do to you that the sea be calm?" What could he say? Could he say, "Repent of your sins and turn to Jehovah and serve Him like I do"? No, he could not say that. Could he claim ignorance, could he say to the sailors, "I don't know what to do. Give me an oar and let's row"? No. He knew exactly why this storm had come. And it was getting worse.

What could he say? Did he say this: "Sailors, it's very obvious what God wants me to do. God called me to go to Nineveh. I have to obey God.

Captain, put the bow of this ship back toward Palestine. Point it towards Nineveh. And I assure you that the moment the bow is pointed toward Nineveh the sea will be calm."

But Jonah did not say that either. He said, "Take me up, and cast me forth into the sea; so shall the sea be calm unto you." There is acknowledgment there, all right. There is an accepting even of the justice that his sin deserves: death. But, you see, God did not call him to death.

He called him to obedience. Repentance is not just being awakened. It is not just being indicted. It is not just acknowledging your fault. It is not even saying that "my death will be justice." Repentance is more. Repentance is the hardest yet of all. Go back, the long way, to where you went wrong. And this time obey.

That is where God's grace is going to lead Jonah. Sometimes death is easier. Sometimes we are brought by God to see just how far down we have gone. The consequences, the long consequences and the guilt are upon us. And we would say that it is easier now to acknowledge my sin and die. "Cast me into the sea."

But God would not have it. "No, child of God. I'm going to bring you back, over many miles,

that. He is going to preach a pretty good sermon, he is going to leave a pretty good testimony before these unbelieving sailors who have come with the indictment, "Why did you run from the presence of the Lord?" for he had told them that he did. "Why hast thou done this?"

Now suppose yourself to be Jonah. Why? The question that is put to you by a heathen man, "Did your God provoke you to flee from Him? Did He deal harshly with you? Did He give you a calling without any encouragement to be with you? Is your God, then, a harsh taskmaster, so that you have to run away from Him? Why? Why have you followed the ways of the world? Why did you set your heart upon them, you who know the Scriptures, you who know fellowship with God? Why? Why did you do that? Is it because the fellowship of sin is better than the fellowship of your God? Produce your reason. Has God been a wilderness to you? Do you have a better friend than your God? Have you found His promises unfaithful? Has the world been better than God to you? Why did you do this?"

Then the third step in the restoration was Jonah's acknowledgment. Jonah evidently told them what he had done.

He confesses that the Lord, the God of heaven, who has made the sea and the dry land, is his God. He is a Hebrew. He was God's servant. "I fear God," he said. "I reverence God." That is all good. But it comes short of a clear and simple confession: "I sinned. I will arise and go to Nineveh. I will obey." Jonah did not say that.

At this point, although Jonah begins to acknowledge a few things, he is still a mass of contradictions. He says to these sailors, "I fear God, but I'm on this ship in disobedience to His command. I am an Hebrew, a friend of God; but I'm running from His presence. The God of heaven made the sea and the dry land, but I'm running from Him." The backslidden Christian is a mass of contradictions.

The child of God overtaken in a fault is the most contradictory thing on the earth. The beauty of an obedient life is symmetry. Symmetry is when everything is in proportion. This is something beautiful. It is when confession and walk of life are consistent. But for a child of God to walk in disobedience, he becomes a mass, a bundle, of contradictions.

The full repentance of Jonah is going to be learned in the belly of a fish. Jonah did not get to

and earth, saith the Lord? Can any hide himself and I shall not see him?" Jonah knew the truth of God's omnipresence—that the Lord God fills heaven and earth and that it is impossible to hide from God. "Thou, God, seest me" (Gen. 16:13). Jonah knew that. Later on, he is going to pray to God out of the belly of a fish in the faith that God fills heaven and earth and that there is no place where God is not.

By the presence of the Lord we must understand those places and those means whereby God makes Himself known. The concept of the presence of the Lord is, first of all, initiated in Genesis 4:16 where we read, "And Cain went out from the presence of the Lord and dwelt in the land of Nod on the east of Eden." That does not mean that Cain, who murdered Abel, went to a place where God could not see him. But he went outside of the Land of Eden, where Adam lived, where God was manifest in Himself. Cain left the realm where God was feared.

Likewise we read in II Kings 13:23 that God was gracious to Israel and did not cast them yet from His presence. God's presence was experienced in the land of promise, Canaan. There He had given prophets to bring His Word. There He gave priests to lead in worship. There were the temple and the sacrifices. God did not yet cast Israel from His

presence—He did not disperse them from that land.

So the presence of the Lord refers to those places and to those things by which God, in a covenant way, manifests Himself to His people through the means He has appointed. For Jonah, that was the land of Canaan. That was the sacrifices of the priests. For us, that is the preaching of the Word of God on the Sabbath. That is divine worship services on Sunday, two times. That is prayer and Scripture reading. That is fellowship with the people of God. Those are the means, those are the places, where the presence of God is experienced.

But Jonah, in a state of disobedience, having decided he was going to go his own way, was determined to put away from himself as far as possible anything that would sting his conscience or remind him of the claims of His God. He would flee from the presence of the Lord. He would go to a place where he could forget. And what better place than in the company of pagan sailors heading toward the most distant location known to man.

All seemed to go well at first. Everything falls into place. He finds a ship going to Tarshish. He pays his fare. He boards the ship, going up the gangplank. Do we see the rats coming off the ship? The captain welcomes

him aboard, “Welcome, Jonah.” Orders are given: “Hoist the sail. Weigh anchor.” And with a sigh of relief, Jonah believes he has put behind him everything that could remind him of the presence of God and of God’s call to him.

Do you ever do that? The Word of God presses upon your conscience. And you believe that the solution will be simply to get away from whatever reminds you of God and His call and His Word. You say, “I’ve got to get away from those parents—that house—that family—that church. I need to criticize the fellowship of God’s people. Who can live with those people?” All an attempt to avoid the presence of God and His call upon you. Do you see this played out before you in your own life? Do you see yourself in Jonah? This is what happens when you have a controversy with God. Then you want to get away from everything that is going to remind you of your obligation to the living God because you do not like what He is saying to you. You do not like it. Maybe you have even said, “I’ll leave the church. I’ll leave this marriage. Who can live with that woman, with that man? I’ll leave this family. I’ll leave these people. They’re my problem. They’re a strait jacket. And I envision that everything is going to be fine on the high seas of life, in some remote part—new people, adventure, glamour.”

Any Jonahs listening today? This is what happens when you have a controversy with God and, for whatever reason, you simply have decided that you are not going to do what He calls you to do because you do not like it.

Here are the symptoms. You can feel it coming to church. You do not want to. You become infrequent in your attendance. You come because your parents make you. You have as much dealings with the Bible as you have to. You do not read it. Why? Because it reminds you of God’s claims. You begin to criticize. You say, “I can’t understand the words of the Bible. I can’t understand those sermons. My family doesn’t understand me. My wife doesn’t understand me. The people, the way they are, who could live with them?” All to silence the voice of your own obligation to God.

So, you say, “Oh, yes, I’ll read my Bible before I go to sleep, a little later, after I check the newspaper or click on the TV.” Do you flee from the presence of the Lord?

But, you see, it is not just the *symptoms* of disobedience there, it is also the *cost* of disobedience. Think of it. What greater good, what greater comfort, than the presence of the *Lord*. “In Thy presence,” says the psalmist, “is fullness of joy. At Thy right hand there are pleasures forevermore.” Scripture says the

exposed not just himself but the whole crew on the deck. He is down below asleep. In the path of disobedience, he sleeps. Disobedience can be like a drug, a sedative. Disobedience can do to your soul what no sleeping pill can do. The further you go in the disobedience, the deeper comes your stupor.

The shipmaster’s words were abrupt. “What meanest thou, O sleeper? arise, call upon thy God, if so be that God will think upon us, that we perish not.” When God will bring us to repentance, to a clear understanding, God does not immediately fix everything. It is not simply that you say a prayer (of Jabez) and now all is OK from then on. Oh, no! That is not the Bible. God wakes you up to your sin and to the danger that is come because of your sin. He woke Jonah up to the reality that, in a sense the pagan mariners saw, this was no ordinary storm. This was God’s judgment, this was God’s chastening hand.

Are you a Jonah today? Do you know God’s first work? God will use whatever He pleases to hurl into your ear, “What meanest thou, O sleeper? What do you mean, father, to cast your whole

family into a turmoil because of your sin? Son and daughter, the storms are brewing in your household. There is no trust. There are bad attitudes. There is bitterness and bickering, resentment because of your sin. It is high time to awake out of your sleep.”

Sometimes we congratulate ourselves on our ability to sleep in a storm. Well, if that means, as with David in Psalm 4, that as a humble, repentant child of God we are leaving to God the outcome of our fears, good. But if you sleep when crashing around you are broken relationships, yelling, bickering, and distance, and when the life of your whole family is subject to the waves of trouble and you are not bothered by it, it is high time that you awake.

The second thing that God did was to bring an indictment of Jonah’s disobedience. When Jonah appeared on the deck and he was singled out by the lot,

*But if you sleep
when crashing around you
are broken relationships...
it is high time
that you awake.*

questions came pouring from the sailors: “Who are you? Why did you do this? What is your occupation? What people are you from?” Every eye was upon him. There is an irony here. Jonah refused to preach to pagan Ninevites. Now, in spite of himself, he is about to do exactly

sequences of sin. That happens. Maybe it was your boss who is an unbelieving man. He rebuked you on an issue involving your faith and walk with God. He has come to know how you work and your personal life. And he calls you into his office and says, "Now listen. You may not do that." Maybe it is the neighbor lady who sees you as a wife all upset and she says, "But why are you so upset? You go to church. You believe in God, don't you?" There is shame here. Sometimes God uses even the wicked world to rebuke the church.

There was a very painful and slow process of restoration. The process that God used with Jonah is often the process that He uses in our lives. I would be very greatly surprised if there were not many Jonahs listening today. The Word of God has come to you and to me.

No, it did not come as it did to Jonah with a voice or a vision. But it came in its inspired Word, a word that has called you to a duty that you are not willing to do, a word that has called you to deal with a sin, perhaps a word that calls you to a certain act of obedience. It comes to you, as it did with Jonah, at a point where you do not want to obey

and you do not want to accept that responsibility and you do not want to put away that sin. So you, too, go and find your ship and go to sleep.

How does God restore us? The first thing we read is that Jonah is awakened. The point, perhaps, of greatest tragedy in the narrative is verse 5: "Then the mariners were afraid, and cried every man unto his god, and cast forth the wares that were in the ship into the sea, to lighten it of them. But Jonah was gone down into the sides of the ship; and he lay, and was fast asleep." Why was he asleep? The storm was great. And even though Jonah might have been weary from a two or three-day travel from Gath-hepher to Joppa, that could

*Disobedience can do
to your soul what
no sleeping pill can do.
The further you go
in the disobedience,
the deeper comes your stupor.*

not explain his sleep in a storm. Why? You see, this is the sleep of the disobedient child of God who finds sleep an

escape from the terrors of conscience. Awake he could not but feel the terror of his conscience. Sleep sometimes does what drunkenness can do. It provides an escape from reality. Jonah does not want to wake up to the reality of what he has done. A sleepy man is oblivious to reality. Jonah is utterly oblivious to the danger in which he has

presence of God is the *super bonum*, it is the quintessence of blessing. What ought to be our greatest delight? The presence of God. Now, look at the cost of disobedience. Is it worth that? The presence of God will be our greatest joy in heaven. If you find yourself running from those things that bring His presence to you—the church, the Bible, prayer, worship services twice on Sunday, your believing family, the communion of saints—if you find yourself avoiding them, you had better look in the mirror and see Jonah.

Why did Jonah do this? What was there about his commission that collided with his will? We want to be very careful in that. We want to be careful when we assign motives to God's people. We might want to speculate. It would not be too hard to speculate. Why did Jonah do that? We could imagine, perhaps, that Jonah was overcome by thoughts of the sheer difficulty of the commission—that great city Nineveh, alien to God. What could one man do? Who was going to listen? Where was his support? And, remember, he was to bring God's Word. And that Word was not, "God has a wonderful plan for your

life." But, "forty days, and God will destroy you in your sins." The best he could anticipate was that he would be laughed at and called a fanatic. But if those were his thoughts, we are not told that they were. There is no hint of that in the book.

*Scripture says
the presence of God
is the super bonum,
it is the quintessence
of blessing.*

And besides, God would have answered him and said, "Jonah, I will be with you. Is not My Word like a ham-

mer?" No, it was not because of the difficulty.

Was it because of the danger? It was not just difficult. It was dangerous! If you read the prophecy of Nahum, you will find that that prophecy is concerned with the wickedness of Nineveh. It is called a bloody city, full of lies and robbery. The dead were unburied on the streets. What was one preacher to do against such wickedness? Would they not just kill him and add his body to the pile of carcasses? But if Jonah had thoughts of fear (and we would not blame him), we do not read of that in this book. And still again, God would say, "Jonah, what time you are afraid, put your trust in Me."

Then why did Jonah run away? If you page ahead in the prophecy to chapter 4:2,

you find the reason. There, after he had been swallowed by the fish, vomited out, gone to Nineveh to preach, and Nineveh has repented, we read, “But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was very angry. And he prayed unto the LORD, and said, I pray thee, O LORD, was not this my saying, when I was yet in my country? Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish: for I knew that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil.” There Jonah stands before God and he is not perplexed and confused over what God has done, but he is angry over what God has done. Why? He says, “I fled to Tarshish because I suspicioned when I was in my own country that the reason I was being sent to the Ninevites was that God was going to show sovereign mercy. He was going to save many of them according to His own eternal, particular good pleasure.” Jonah was filled with the attitude that had crept in upon Israel—an attitude finding its source in his own sinful flesh. That attitude was that God’s mercy belonged to Israel. And those whom *he* considered unworthy, those Gentile dogs, those people of Nineveh—God should not work among them His electing mercy! When God’s people were mindful of their unworthiness and of the sheer mercy of God to them, they had

no problem with God’s purpose of extending mercy to the elect placed in other nations. They remembered the word to Abraham: “In thee shall all nations of the earth be blessed.” They confessed and rejoiced in the truth of the universal church out of every nation and manner of people—every tribe and tongue. But when spiritual apathy set in in Israel, they began to think that they were God’s favorites and God needed them. They could not conceive of God giving grace to *other* people, to pagans.

Jonah became resentful of God showing mercy to those he considered unworthy. And it was not a passing thing. It was a settled disposition. It stuck with him through all of his preaching in Nineveh and it was something that God had to chide and rebuke him for over and over and to say to him, “Jonah, I will show mercy to whom *I* will show mercy; and whom *I* will, I will harden. *I’m* sovereign. The church is built on *My* good pleasure. I do not send out My saving mercy on the basis of your prejudice or your ideas as to who *you* think should make a nice addition to the church. *I* show mercy as *I* please, to whomsoever *I* will.”

There are some mighty powerful lessons here. We certainly see the weakness of the most holy of God’s people if they are left to themselves. Jonah was a holy man of God, make no

man, ocean and wind, insects and fish are His army to do His will. God uses first the element of wind. “The Lord sent out,” literally “hurled,” a great wind into the sea. And that stormy wind fulfilled His word. It blew harder and harder. As the narrative goes on (v. 11), “the sea wrought, and was tempestuous.” As the captain and the sailors questioned Jonah on the deck of the heaving ship, more and more became the waves of the sea. It is as if the Lord says, “What shall I use? All is at My disposal from the tiny cut worm which will eat the root of Jonah’s gourd (chapter 4), to the air current and the weather patterns. They are all My servants.”

You remember that God also used the lot. Pagan sailors cast lots to find out who was the root-cause of their problems. They say, “Come, and let us cast lots, that we may know for whose cause this evil is upon us.” The Lord controlled that. The lot is cast into the lap (Prov. 16), but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord. So we read, “and the lot fell upon Jonah.” People call it chance, it just so happened that way. A sinner says: “A mere coincidence caught me. I had it all figured out. It was perfect. Just one thing, and who could have known?” Do you talk that way? Do you curse “bad luck”? The lot fell upon Jonah. Of course it did, because God is in His heavens (Deut. 32). Be

very sure: your sins will find you out.

Then God uses a great fish. Even though translated in the New Testament KJV as a whale, it was simply a great fish. God prepared one. The mighty God spoke and brought that fish to swallow Jonah.

So God is able to use all things. But in the narrative we see that Jonah’s restoration was not confined only to the brute creation. That is, the elements God used were not only found in the brute creation, but they included men, pagan men. That is something to notice. If you read Jonah, chapter 1, then you see that the pagan sailors were used of God to ask some very probing questions, questions that nailed Jonah in his disobedience. God did not have another prophet somewhere hidden in the vessel to jump out and rebuke Jonah. No, God used unbelieving and idolatrous sailors. “What meanest thou, O sleeper? arise, call upon thy God. Tell us why this evil is come upon us. Who are you? What is your occupation? What did you do? Why did you do that?”

Has that ever happened to you? There is shame here. There is shame when the church is rebuked by the world. But it happens. One child of God in disobedience sometimes sees less than even the unbelieving world sees concerning the con-

task. God had a purpose with Jonah. And God would not let go and allow Jonah to destroy himself. He would restore him.

But that way of restoration is hard. Do not abuse the doctrines of grace. Do not play with the seriousness of disobeying God. The way back for Jonah would be slow and hard, and it would break him in pieces. The way of hell is easy. The way of grace, of restoration, is severe, though it be blessed. Jonah, in his disobedience, rebelled against God, and he involved others in his rebellion. Now the Lord is going to work and bring him back. He is going to restore him to obedience.

Let us look, then, for a few moments at the God who would not let go.

|| *God brings you to repentance.*
|| *God changes the heart.*
|| *God's love tracks you down.*

“But the LORD,” we read, “sent out a great wind into the sea, and there was a mighty tempest in the sea, so that the ship was like to be broken” (v. 4). That is a very comforting truth. That shows that the hand of God reached out for Jonah. God’s purpose was to bring His child to repentance. And we see, first of all, that the repentance of the child of God, and of Jonah, was due to God’s initiative, it was due to the activity of God Himself. “But the LORD sent out a great wind” (v.

4). “Now the LORD had prepared a great fish” (v. 17). “The LORD spake unto the fish” (2:10). “And the word of the LORD came unto Jonah” (3:1). God takes Jonah in hand and says, “You, by the weakness of your flesh, by your foolish disobedience, and by your carnal mind, have chosen the path of disobedience, which will lead you to destruction and bring ruin upon all around you. That is what you did. But you have not silenced My love for you. My purpose is to bring you to repentance, Jonah, because (Ps. 89) My covenant is sure; no change can it know. Lamentations 3: ‘It is of the LORD’s mercies that we are not consumed.’ Malachi 3:6: ‘I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed.’”

|| God brings you to repentance. God changes the heart. God’s love tracks you down.

We see, then, that God is going to restore a man who walked in blatant disobedience. His divine love takes the initiative.

But we marvel at the diversity of the means of God. What Jonah had tried to do, of course, was preposterous and shows the folly and the stupidity of his sin. To flee from the presence of the Lord? God calls Himself “the Lord of hosts.” All the creation, all of its creatures,

mistake. He was a prophet of God. He was a means to bring God’s Word. He was faithful in a difficult and a frightening commission. But the best saint, when left to himself, is foolish and blind.

Let the Word of God now, today, speak to you. Jonah is not an excuse. He is not an example here to follow. He is a beacon to warn you. No matter the graces that you have, no matter your spiritual track record, no matter your advancements, if you are left to yourself there is no sin that you could not commit. Every child of God—that is you!—is of himself capable of committing the most foul sin. If you do not believe that, the devil is at your door.

Look at the frightening power of this spiritual pride—the frightening power when we begin to think that somehow God’s mercy to us was because we deserved it, that somehow we rank higher than someone else, that it is because of our skin color or our income or our social class or our simple decency that we are in the church. And then we say, “Well, look at those filthy

people over there.” And we base our revulsion of sin on ourselves and not on the holy God. And we condemn others, not because of their sin before God, but because they, apparently, do not measure up to us.

Still more, would you note with me the danger of judging from God’s providence as to whether or not you are doing the will of God. Everything at first seemed to work out well for Jonah. He disobeys, and the ground did not break open under his feet. He made his way to Joppa, that seaport, and a travel agent could not have done anything better. He finds a ship. He is going to Tarshish. He pays his fare. The sail is set. Here is a man who has defied God, disobeyed God’s will, and apparently everything is going well. It looks like God is going to wink. But He is not.

If you read that first chapter yourself, you will see the repeated play on the word “down.” He went *down* to Joppa. He went *down* into the ship. Jonah was gone *down* into the sides of the ship. Then he goes *down* to the bottom of the sea.

|| *No matter the graces
that you have,
no matter your
spiritual track record,
no matter your advancements,
if you are left to yourself
there is no sin
that you could not commit.* ||

It is all down! Do not gauge whether you are doing God's will by your feelings or by the apparent success in your life. God says to you as a young person: "Do not be unequally yoked with an unbeliever." But maybe you say, "Well, I'm dating this unbelieving boy (girl). It's working out OK. He's a nice guy! He is not a member of the church, but I asked God that if it was not His will then He not give me these feelings for him. And I prayed that if I was not to marry him, then God would stop the marriage, He'd break my leg." Not only young people but even married people reason that way. The new, the second wife—"I divorced my wife. And that other woman, if I wasn't supposed to have her, why do I have these feelings for her. And she's so nice. So I am going to do that."

Now, what do you want God to do? Do you want God to lasso you on the way down the aisle of marriage to tell you that you are not supposed to get married to that person? Is that what you want? You must not gauge God's will by your feelings. You must gauge it from the holy Scriptures. We could

apply that to a career. You might say, "Well, if God doesn't want me to have that job that takes me away from the church, then He's going to close the door, right?" What do you want God to do—send bankruptcy into that new corporation to tell you not to join it? God's will is, Seek His kingdom! Be faithful to the church. Your Sabbath life, your family life, that is how you gauge where you are going to work—not on their offer.

But sometimes we get our own will into our teeth, just like the horse gets the bit in its teeth. And we interpret everything by feel. We interpret God's providence to be an evidence of His approval, that this is His will. Now, listen. God's *providence* does not teach you His will. God's *Word* teaches you His will.

Jonah, at this point, leaves us with a heavy heart. We see ourselves. And we pray, Lord, conform me to Thy will. Make me obedient, holy, and trusting.

Let us pray.

Father, bless Thy word to our hearts through Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray, Amen.

*You must not
gauge God's will
by your feelings.
You must gauge it
from the holy Scriptures.*

we interpret
everything by
feel. We inter-
pret God's
providence to
be an evidence
of His approv-
al, that this is

THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR

*July 20, 2014
No. 3733*

*The God Who Would Not Let Go
Rev. Carl Haak*

Dear Radio Friends,

Please open your Bibles to Jonah, chapter 1. Last week we looked at Jonah, the prophet who ran away. We left him in a ship headed for Tarshish, the most remote place in the then-known world. And we imagined that at first the winds were favorable, the sails billowed, the coast of Palestine receded in the distance, and perhaps Jonah believed that God would be tolerant. Jonah, although he had received the clear commission from God, did not believe that God's mercy should be shown to those despicable pagans in Nineveh. He would not go to Nineveh.

In his disobedience, he wanted to push away from him as far as possible anything that reminded him of God's presence and commandment, anything that could remind him of his obligation to God. He fled from the presence of the Lord, from that place where God was worshiped, where His Word was heard, where prayer was offered, where His people were found. He wanted it removed from his eyes.

We saw, then, that the

best of the saints, when left to themselves, are capable of the greatest and most foolish of sins.

Today, our focus shifts to the God who will not let go. The whole picture changes in three words: "But the LORD" (v. 4)—words that express the sovereign grace of God in the preservation and the restoration of backslidden children. In verse 3 we read, "But Jonah fled from the presence of the Lord." Those words represent our depravity in our sinful nature to choose the way of disobedience to God. In verse 4, "But the Lord," we see an expression of the cause of our salvation.

According to many churches and theologians, almost everything depends upon man, and a little on God's election and preserving grace. If that were so, it would have been the end of Jonah. If God's dealings with Jonah depended upon Jonah himself, God would have said, "Jonah, you did it now. You disobeyed and forfeited any right to be called My prophet. I'm casting you away." But that is not how God works.

God has elected Jonah to a