

* **God's Mercy with Repentant Sinners**
Jonah 3:10

* **A Sinful Response to Sovereign Mercy**
Jonah 4:1-5

* **God's Rebuke of a Pouting Prophet**
Jonah 4:6-11

* **A Greater Than Jonah Is Here**
Matthew 12:41

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Pastor of
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September 7, 2014 — No. 3740

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repentance. But we cannot give repentance. Christ is the One who gives repentance. Through His Word preached He breaks the power of sin. Through the proclamation of the gospel and through the living Scriptures declared to you, He actually cuts away the iron bracelets and iron chains of your sins and gives to you repentance. Where do I find strength to repent? Where do I find the grace to change those ingrained patterns of my life going unto every sin? That power is found in Jesus Christ, for He is the power of the living God. The greater than Jonah is here.

Our Lord Jesus Christ is risen from the dead. And He is at the right hand of His heavenly Father. As the Lord of the church He gives the fullness of salvation to His church. And He reigns. In the shadows of the Old Testament the Word of Jesus Christ preached by Jonah brought the Ninevites to repentance. Now you and I stand in a far clearer light: the completed work of Jesus Christ, the full inspired Scriptures, the church called to preach to us the faithful truth of the Scriptures. As you stand before that greater light of fulfillment in Christ, the Word of God comes to you

and says, "In the day of judgment the men of Nineveh will condemn all who wickedly and foolishly reject the Christ of the Scriptures. For when they heard Jonah, they repented. Of how much greater punishment shall they be found worthy who reject the great Light of the greater than Jonah?"

Do you stand before the gospel with indifference? Or, by the grace of God, do you stand in repentance? And do you look

to Jesus Christ, by grace, as all of your salvation? And do you marvel over a mercy of God shown to you so undeserving?

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

Let us pray.

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

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THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR

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God's Mercy with Repentant Sinners
Rev. Carl Haak

Dear Radio Friends,

Returning once more to our study in the book of Jonah, we have come today to Jonah 3:10. We read, "And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do unto them; and he did it not."

Last week we saw that God brought Nineveh to repentance through His Word. We saw that God was the author of this repentance, verse 5: "So the people of Nineveh believed God." The dramatic change in the city of Nineveh was not caused by buildings falling down, walls and towers collapsing, or a fear of terrorists. Nineveh was the terrorist nation of the then-known world.

But the repentance was caused by the Word of God. Jonah had preached the preaching that God had bidden him to preach. And the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God, had gone forth to conquer and to bring men and women to repentance before God.

Is that so with you today?

We learn, further, that the people of Nineveh had thorough

dealings with their sin against God. They turned from their own evil way and from the violence that was in their hands. They saw sin no longer in general terms, but they looked upon their own hearts. They were not satisfied any longer simply to nod their head in agreement that men are very bad and sinful. But they saw their own evil way and they dropped the sin that was in their own hand and fled from it in repentance.

Further, we saw that they pleaded for the mercy of God. They had heard the message of the mercies that were in God through Jesus Christ.

Now, in verse 10, we read of Jehovah's response, or Jehovah's dealings with those who have been brought to repentance. This verse is written in order of time as we see it. We see it this way: Nineveh repented; and God did not destroy them but showed mercy. The Scriptures tell us that eternally God had willed their repentance. From all eternity God has determined the salvation of His people and, by His grace, He has purposed to accomplish it. We read in II Timothy 2:25: "If God

peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth.” And in Romans 2:4: “The goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance.” And Acts 15:18: “Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world.”

But let us not miss the clear and very wonderful meaning. God treats repentant sinners in mercy. “I will heal their backslidings,” He says through the prophet. “I will have mercy and compassion; I will abundantly pardon.”

What a fitting thing for us to contemplate today—God’s dealings with repentant sinners. God did not do with us as we deserved. He did not pour out upon us the evil that we had coming. But He gave Christ for all the sins of His people. And the Holy Spirit gives us to know this wonderful mercy of God. When we know that mercy, that God has dealt with us in mercy, then our hearts must soar in gratitude.

If we look at the verse again, we see that God’s

dealings with the repentant sinners are described for us in three verbs: God *saw* their works, God *repented* of the evil, and God *did* it not.

First of all, God saw their works, that they turned from

their evil way. There was a look of favor upon them. Now, what does that mean that God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way? Does it mean that there were some things that God notices and there are other things that He did not? Obviously, that is not the meaning. The Scriptures teach us that the knowledge of God is infinite. “The eyes of the Lord,” say the Scriptures, “are in every place, beholding the good and the evil.” God knows all there is to know about all things in all places all the time. He knows all things in all places eternally. He says in His Word, “As I have thought, so shall it also be.” If you want to know how small you are, think about that. That will bring you to your knees with Job to say, “I am but as yesterday,” or with David in Psalm 139, “Such knowledge is too great for me, it is high; I cannot attain unto it.”

Then, what *does* it mean

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that God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way? It means that God looked upon the repentance of the Ninevites with favor, with pleasure, with acceptance, as something that was true and genuine, with His approval. Now, let us remember that God sent His Word and His Spirit among them. He

Christ whose heart loves the accomplishment of God’s will. We hear His Word, which does not come to us thus, “Well, this is what I’m supposed to tell you and so let’s get on with it and let’s be done with it.” But it comes to us by the Spirit of Christ, the Spirit of Christ who loves to obey the Father. We hear the Word of Christ! Now, what will our apathy and indifference be met with if we hear the Word of the greater Jonah and turn away with unbelief and reject that Word?

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

Still more. Our Lord Jesus Christ was greater than Jonah in His power, the power of judgment. Jonah was sent to proclaim judgment of almighty God upon those who would lift themselves up against God. He could not bring that judgment. But Jesus executes the judgments of God. He not only brings the Word of God, but He executes the judgments of God. He sits upon the throne, and all

men shall be judged by Him. He is the mighty Son of God. But He is great also in His power of salvation. Jonah could not save. It was the Spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ who worked in Nineveh and saved the people of God. Nor could Jonah furnish the grace of repentance, the grace of a new and holy life. He could not bring that, of his power, to his audience. The Ninevites

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could come to Jonah and say, “Jonah, I believe what you say is true. Can you do something to break my heart from the chains

of sin? Can you turn away my lust and make me pure?” Jonah would have to shake his head and say, “No, I can’t do that. The very fact that you even believe my preaching is not due to my power. It is due to the power of my God. I don’t have that power. I look to my God with dependent eyes just as you must look to Him to break the power of sin in your life.”

But now the greater than Jonah is before us—the One who *gives* repentance—the One who works within us both to will and to do of God’s good pleasure. His is the power of repentance. We can preach repentance as Jonah preached

God. Let us bow in repentance. For if, having heard the greater revelation through Jesus Christ, you and I would reject it and go our own way in unbelief, the very men of Nineveh will rise up in the judgment against us. For, when they heard Jonah who was just a minor light compared to Jesus, they repented.

Still more. We see that Jesus Christ is greater in His obedience. Jonah was marked by disobedience and being very reluctant. From the opening commission that he received from God to go to Nineveh even to the last chapter of the book, Jonah revealed himself as being narrow of heart and disobedient before his God. But how different when we turn to the pages of the Scriptures, the gospel narratives of the life of our Lord Jesus Christ. Our Savior was commissioned of God the Father and He was sent to secure the salvation of the host of God's elect. And He came with a holy and ardent and obedient heart. It was the Lord Jesus who could say to His disciples who had returned from a village seeking food, "I have meat to eat that ye know not of. My meat is to do the will of him that sent me and to finish

his work." He could say to them, "I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished." Always the Lord Jesus Christ

was the obedient Son of God who had come to perform all the Father's good pleasure. Even when He knew that that meant that He must be humbled, humbled down to the deepest sorrows and

reproach of God against our sin upon a cross; even when He knew that it would bring Him into the awful and horrible darkness of the cross; yet our Lord Jesus Christ was the obedient Son of God who, in love for the Father and in love for His church, said, "I come, I come to do Thy will, O God." He was not a reluctant prophet. He was not a reluctant Savior. But His will burned within Him to obey all the will and word of His heavenly Father. He is the greater than Jonah.

Now the men of Nineveh repented at the preaching of Jonah. He was a reluctant prophet. And yet they repented. They repented under the preaching of a narrow-hearted prophet. But now we hear the Word of God sent from Jesus

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had brought His Word through a man, Jonah, to whom the Lord had granted first repentance and obedience. Jonah preached the Word of God. Jonah had not preached a wannabe God who was looking for man to accept him. But Jonah preached the living God in whose hands man is. Jonah proclaimed the issues of sin, of a holy God, and of judgment. Jonah declared the truth of accountability to God, answerability, and being exposed to the wrath of God for sin. Jonah had proclaimed the promises of God in Jesus Christ. Jonah brought God's Word to them.

And what did God see as the response? He saw their works, that they turned from their evil way. Was that the Ninevites' works? Well, yes, but only because God had first worked it in them; only because, as we read in Philippians 2:13, "It is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure." God looked with favor upon His own work. God admires what He does. God admires all of His works, and God especially admires and is pleased with His work of grace. God saw His grace, which produced true, sincere, rare repentance. God saw His grace working in Nineveh a sorrow after a godly

sort, seen in humble, trusting obedience to God. God saw that their repentance was not a sham, not merely an outward sacrifice. It was not rooted simply in the emotions, but it was rooted in the new heart that God had given. And God was pleased. God was glorified. God expressed His favor upon the Ninevites and upon His grace in them.

Let us apply that for just a moment. The Word of God comes to you, too. You, too, today, in this program, and, I trust, in a faithful church, have heard the preaching that God has sent — the preaching of His Word — the preaching of the Word of the Holy Scriptures that tells you that you are not independent, out to make your own way, but you are accountable, created by God and answerable to God. The preaching tells you of your sin and of Christ alone as Savior. Now God looks to see His grace. God looks to see His grace within the hearts of His children, that we walk with humble and thankful hearts before the living God. Yes, the eyes of God today are on all that goes on in the Oval Office and in Cabinet meetings; all that happens throughout the whole world in the strategies of men, in business rooms, in court rooms, and on Wall Street. Yes, the eyes

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of God are everywhere, ruling and judging and determining. But the focus of the eye of God is not on the pronouncements of men, not on the ragings of unbelief against His Christ. His eye beholds where His Word is heard and brought to the heart. There God rejoices.

Is that true of you, by the grace of God? God rejoices, God looks with pleasure and favor upon His children when, by His grace, they walk in repentance. When, by the Word of God, they are changed unto new creatures;

when God brings them to repentance, that they know their sin and they see it as God

sees, and they are broken and humbled before God. God looks with favor on the lonely and broken and lowly heart of the child of God who feels as if he is forever abandoned because of his sin. Hear the Word of God: God looks with favor upon such a heart, with His approval and blessing.

The next thing we read: "And God repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do unto them." What was the evil that God had said He would do to Nineveh? In verse 4 of chapter 3 we read that Jonah proclaimed,

"Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown." The evil that God said He would do was to judge their wickedness and to call down upon their heads what their sins deserved. The evil that God would do, then, was not a moral evil. God does not do wicked things. But it was in the sense of calamity and destruction upon Nineveh. The evil, as men would see it. Men would think that it is good that they go on in their sins. But God, in justice, visits men with destruction because of their sin. God takes men up in His hands to

reckon with them.

God repented of the evil that He had said that He would do.

He repented. He did not bring the overthrow that He said He would.

Now, what does that mean? Immediately wicked men twist the Word of God. As Peter says in II Peter 3, they wrestle with the Scriptures unto their own destruction. Immediately someone would take this verse, and others like it (perhaps in Genesis 6, where we read that it repented the Lord that He had made man and it grieved him at His heart), and they would say, "Ah, God changes His mind. God is fickle. God reacts to man. It

Jonah was a man in whom God had placed His word. Jesus Christ is the Word of God. In Jesus Christ and through the holy Scriptures, the whole will of God is revealed. The whole counsel of God concerning our redemption is declared to us in Jesus Christ. And now Jesus declares that a greater than Jonah is here. Notice that He does not say how much greater. He simply says, "greater." Jonah was a little picture. He was a flash of light in the dark sea of the Old Testament. Now the Son of God stands before

the Jews. And the Son of God has given to us the completed and inspired holy Scriptures. Of

how much greater punishment will one be made worthy if he rejects this very Son of God?

Do you see the application? Our light is greater even than the Lord's generation. Jesus Christ has died upon the cross and is risen. He is exalted at the Father's right hand, and the Father hath given to us the holy Scriptures and poured out the Holy Spirit. Now the Father has sent preaching to us in the name

of Jesus Christ so that through that preaching, the preaching of the holy Scriptures, the voice of Jesus Christ is heard by His sheep. When we come to worship in the appointed way of God, when we come to church and hear the preaching of the Word of God and we bow our heads under that Word of God and that Word of God is preached to us in its truth, then a greater than Jonah is before us—the living and abiding Word of Christ.

Jesus Christ and His gospel

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is nothing that you may simply ignore, push aside. You may not simply say, "Oh, well, that is a quaint

relic of the past. That's ancient tradition. Let's come and blow the dust off the cover and see what we like about it." You may not say that!

No, Jesus Christ and His gospel, His Word, and the preaching of Jesus Christ is the glorious revelation of the truth, the only truth of salvation. The greater than Jonah is here. Let us take heed to that Word of God. Let us hold fast that Word of

the grace of God believed and repented under the preaching of Jonah are going to stand up and condemn them for rejecting Jesus Christ. They will say to them, "You are inexcusable. You stood in a clear light, because a greater than Jonah stood before you. We received little rays of light, a little glimpse through the prophet Jonah. But *you* received the very Son of God in your midst. And you did not believe Him."

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

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

But our Lord Jesus Christ? Our Lord Jesus Christ is the obedient and perfect Son of God. Our Lord Jesus Christ did not receive His message by bits and pieces. But He dwelt with the Father. He was *in* the Father's bosom. He said, "He that cometh from above is above all: he that

is of the earth is earthly, and speaketh of the earth: he that cometh from heaven is above all. And what he hath seen and heard, that he testifieth; and no man receiveth his testimony" (John 3:31, 32).

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

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

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

does matter what man does. God waits to see what man will do, and then God makes up His mind as to what He will do."

Now we ask the question, How do we square this Word of God (God repented of the evil that He had said He would do) with the decrees of God? The answer is this: This verse (God repented of the evil that He had said He would do) does not mean that there was a change in the eternal plan of God. It does not mean that God purposed one thing eternally and then altered, or changed, His mind. Repentance, as in a change of purpose, is something that God does not and cannot do. Numbers 23:19: "God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?" 1 Samuel 15:29: "And also the Strength of Israel will not lie nor repent: for he is not a man, that he should repent." Romans 1:29: "For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance."

What does it mean that God repented of the evil? It means that, from our point of view, it seemed that God would do one thing, and then He did it not. As we behold the unfolding of

God's eternal purposes, it has the appearance of a change of mind toward His creatures. That is not, of course, the case in reality. Eternally God wills all, God knows all that He shall do. And, remember, God had never said that He would overthrow a repentant Nineveh. It was the Nineveh whose sin came up against Him that He said He would overthrow. By His grace, He had purposed that Nineveh would repent. God's will is fixed. God's decree is eternal. But as it unfolds, it unfolds in justice. Sin brings judgment. Repentance brings blessing.

Let us apply that a moment. God says that there is an unbreakable bond between sin and judgment on the one hand, and repentance and mercy on the other. From Genesis to Revelation, the Bible makes that plain. Sin brings judgment. And, in the way of the grace of repentance, we experience the favor of God.

Then the hope of the child of God is not that God will change. God does not change. The wages of sin is death. The way of evil is destruction. But the hope of the child of God is that God is unchangeable in His mercy. God brings the grace of repentance, and with that grace of repentance comes the assur-

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ance of God's favor and blessing. We read in Proverbs 28:13: "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy." When God makes you humble and lowly, and when God gives you grace to confess your great misery as your sin, you shall find mercy at the hand of God. Mercy awaits, gracious mercy, mercy that God promises in the way of repentance. God does not change. No, from all eternity His purposes towards His people in Christ are purposes of tender mercy to bring us to repentance that we might know the blessings of His mercy.

Finally, we read that God did it not, that is, He did not overthrow Nineveh at that time. From a study of the Word of God as set forth in the books of the Kings and Chronicles, Nineveh continued for a period of at least another hundred years. That is, we believe that the repentance, then, took root in that generation and in the one following—they taught the way of the Lord to their children. And we have here already a foretelling of the glorious advance of the gospel and of the truth that the desert shall blossom as a rose. The judgments of God did not come for that generation.

Why did not God bring judgment? Was it because they repented? Now the answer is this: The judgment of God's people in Nineveh was diverted from their own head because it was inflicted on the Christ. Hear me carefully! Repentance does not atone for our sins. Repentance does not erase our sins from the sight of God. Repentance does not pay for our sin and avoid the judgment. The blood of Jesus Christ alone

erases sin and pays for our judgment. Repentance is the gift of God in Jesus Christ worked in the hearts of those whom God has chosen in Christ and redeemed in the blood of His Son and to whom He has given His Spirit. God did not pour His judgment upon us, upon His children, a judgment that would have made us perish. But God did cast that judgment upon His own Son. The Word of God, Romans 8: "He spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all." He was delivered for our offenses. He was crucified for our transgressions.

Does God know you, by His grace, as a repentant sinner? Do you say, "Even though my very repentance is imperfect and something that I need to repent of, yet God knows that He has worked it in me"? Do you say,

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the context of our Lord's words in Matthew 12. The scribes and Pharisees had apparently walked up to Jesus with an outward politeness and respect. "Master, we would see a sign from Thee." Actually, they hated Jesus and they were coming with an outward veneer.

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

The Lord's response was, "An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign. But there shall no sign be given unto it but the sign of the prophet Jonah." Jesus was not fooled by their outward courtesy, an outward courtesy that masked an unbelieving heart. He sees them

as those who loved the darkness and hated the light, and He calls them an evil generation, corrupt, that is, that their motives were despicable and cruel and proud. He says, "You are an adulterous generation. You are spiritually unfaithful to your God. You have gone a-whoring. You want a sign from Me? No sign will be given you but the sign of the prophet Jonah." Specifically He says to them, "For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth." A sign? You want some display of physical power? No, I'm going to give you a mighty display of the power of grace. God will give His Son over to death, the death of the cross, for the sin of God's people. And He will raise Him the third day. This shall be the sign of the mighty saving grace of God.

Then He turns the scene on the Jews. "You need something more to believe on Me? You need something more to persuade you and convince you? My coming from God and My dying upon a cross for sin, that is not enough for you? I tell you that the men of Nineveh shall condemn this generation because *they* repented at the preaching of Jonah. And a greater than Jonah is here." He is saying to them that the men and women, boys and girls, who through

THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR

September 28, 2014
No. 3743

A Greater Than Jonah Is Here
Rev. Carl Haak

Dear Radio Friends,

In the past weeks and months we have examined the content of the book of Jonah, the record of the strong-willed prophet and of God's unique and merciful dealings with him. We saw that the theme of that book is the sovereignty of God's mercy, as we read in Romans 9:18, "Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth." And we say that the book brings to us the beautiful faithfulness of God to His rebellious, strong-willed prophet and of how the book shows us the truth of Lamentations 3, "It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, ... great is thy faithfulness." Or, as the apostle Paul expressed it in I Corinthians 15, I am what I am by the grace of God.

We conclude our series on the book of Jonah by considering an amazing observation from the lips of our Lord Jesus on

the ministry of Jonah. Our Lord spoke of Jonah in Mat-

thew 12:41. We read, "The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here." Our Lord Jesus Christ assumed that His listeners would be acquainted with details of Jonah. And I may assume that that should be true now of my audience today. Our Lord says to men of His day (and to you and to me), that although Jonah has lived many years ago, the record of Jonah has bearing on you and me, even to the day of judgment. The book of Jonah is not just a story. But there is something of Jonah that impinges on you and on me. What is that?

The book of Jonah brings

...the greater the worth
and the light of the messenger,
the greater the responsibility
or guilt
if the message is rejected.

rejected.

Let us look, for a moment, at

by His grace, "I acknowledge my sin before God. I loathe myself. I am the sinner, and it grieves me that I have offended my God"? Then hear the oath of God: "I will have mercy. I am a God of lovingkindness and tender pity." Believe that faithful promise of God, who hath blotted out your sins and now looks upon you with pleasure. God delights in showing mercy.

That is wonderfully brought out in the parable of the prodigal son. There God shows that He does not have "half-way" houses. The repentant children of God are not sent to a shack out in the back. But God brings them from the pig-pen to His own house. "Put the robe upon him and put a ring upon his finger and let us make merry, for my son who was dead is alive!"

Very often a verse in Luke 15 is misquoted. There we read the Scriptures: "I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that

repenteth." Very often that is meant to say that the angels rejoice over a repentant sinner. But that is not what it says. Whose joy? "I say that joy shall be in heaven." Whose joy? The angels? No! That is God's joy! In heaven God rejoices! God rejoices when He sees the grace of repentance. For His great delight is to show mercy to His people.

Now believe this promise of God. He hath not dealt with us according to our sins nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward them that fear Him.

Let us pray.

Father, we thank Thee for Thy Word. We would ask that Thou wilt write it upon our hearts. We pray through Jesus Christ, Amen.

THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR

September 14, 2014 *A Sinful Response to Sovereign Mercy*
 No. 3741 *Rev. Carl Haak*

Dear Radio Friends,

As we continue in the study of the book of Jonah, we come to yet another startling and strange episode in the life of this prophet. We again see that the Word of God in this book centers not so much in the prophetic utterances of Jonah, his sermons, but in the very life and actions of the prophet himself.

Let us remember a few of the facts. Originally Jonah had been commissioned to go to the city of Nineveh and cry against it because their wickedness had come up before God. Jonah, however, ran away. He turned one hundred eighty degrees to go to Joppa and found a ship to Tarshish, a distant, remote location. But God will not let go. He sends a storm upon the ship and He rebukes the prophet through pagan sailors. He prepares a fish. When Jonah is cast overboard, the fish swallows him. And Jonah is in the belly of the fish for three days, after which the fish spits him back out on dry land. Then the Lord renews His commission: Jonah, go to Nineveh and preach the preaching that I bid thee. And God powerfully uses the Word spoken by Jonah to

bring repentance to His own in Nineveh.

Now we come to chapter 4. We learn of Jonah's reaction to this mighty display of the sovereign mercies of God. We read, "It displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was very angry."

Let us begin by asking the question: What should have been Jonah's response to the mercy of God shown to the Ninevites? Well, we would expect joy. From every aspect, the book of Jonah is one of mercy. It is, first of all, about God's mercy to Jonah, who had rebelled against his God. Yet, God had preserved His servant from his own folly. And God, in mercy, had brought him to repentance in the fish's belly and brought him to Nineveh to be His mouthpiece. It was a vision of mercy when God showed mercy to the pagan mariners on the ship. And, greatest of all, God's mercy in the book of Jonah is shown to the Ninevites. We have, as it were, a flash of light in the Old Testament—a flash of the light of the gospel of Jesus Christ going to all nations to gather a church out of

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 spitefully 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. 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.

*God's mercy
 makes us merciful.*

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 unrec-
onciled 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 life of a child of God 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. My pleasure must be your pleasure.”

God may teach you these truths in a very practical way, as Jonah and 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 others, 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. God had purposed to show mercy to Nineveh. And we can show ourselves to be so contrary and so far from what God desires.

Yet God shows mercy to Jonah and He brings Jonah to repentance. God is telling us that when we receive His mercy,

*“Though my flesh
and my heart faileth,
God is the strength
of my heart and
my portion forever.”*

all people, elect and precious, one church in Christ.

After all of that, we must remember that Jonah is a prophet. In a sense he has a very special passion given to him, by grace, for the glory of God. He is a true prophet who wants and is consumed with the glory of God above all things. Certainly we would think that a prophet would rejoice when the mercy of God, His sovereign mercy, is so powerfully displayed. What should have been the response? Joy!

But what was the response? The language leaves no doubt. “But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was very angry” (Jonah 4:1). It was a response of extreme displeasure, irritation, which degenerated into extreme anger. And it was startling and stark. It is almost as if we would wonder if we are reading the book right. But it is no mistake. Jonah resented what God had done and got angry over it. The word “angry” here means “to glow, to wax warm, to blaze up, to flare.” Jonah blew his cork. He got angry at God. And it was not something passing, for a moment. But it was deep-seated. When God comes in verse 4 to deal with His narrow-hearted prophet, His hot-tempered servant, God asks him the question: “Doest thou well to be angry?” And Jonah does not even answer.

We read in verse 5, “So Jonah went out of the city.” He got up and walked off. “I’m not going to talk about it.” It was a carnal anger, a horrible, sinful, shameful thing, as if Jehovah did not know the end from the beginning, as if Jehovah’s ways are not right. And now Jonah’s response to the display of God’s sovereign mercy was, not that he was perplexed, not that he had questions about how all of this was going to fit together. No! That was not his response. His response was: he was angry with God.

Now we need to ask why he was so angry. In a moment we are going to look at the prayer that he utters in verses 2 and 3 of chapter 4 and that is going to give us the reason. But on the surface, we should see at least two things that stood at the root of his anger.

First of all, God had done something that Jonah did not want. Or maybe it would be better to put it this way: God had not done what Jonah wanted to be done. We gather that if after his sacrifice, and his journeying to Nineveh and preaching to the Ninevites the judgments of God, God had destroyed the city and wiped them out, Jonah would have gone home happy. Here he had done what God said. He was not happy about it, but he had obeyed. He had preached what God had told him to preach. But

instead of getting the result that Jonah wanted, God's sovereign way was something different. And Jonah did not like it.

Does that sound familiar? We are taught to pray, "Thy will be done," but very often that prayer can mean for us, "Thy will be done, so long as it's according to my liking. But do not do anything that would be contrary to my plan for things in my life. I'm supposed to be accepted at this college. I'm supposed to be accepted by my friends. I'm supposed to make the team. I'm supposed to, as a husband and wife (a young couple), have two boys and two girls, our own house and a nice back yard. I'm supposed to get A's in this class. I'm supposed to be pretty." And if it doesn't happen, do you get mad and go off and pout against God?

Oh, beloved in the Lord Jesus Christ, may Father's mercies soften our foolish, proud, selfish heart and make us at all times reconciled to Father's will, to receive all things from the Father's hand as being right.

Secondly, at the root of his anger was that Jonah had forgotten God's

mercy to him. Jonah was not consciously, experientially, living in the wonder of God's mercy to him. Compare Jonah to the apostle Paul (I Tim. 1:16). Paul says, "Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all long-suffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting." Paul says, aware of God's mercy, aware of the fact that *I* was the one who was so hardened against God, now having received that mercy, let my experience be for the encouragement of others to know God's loving-kindness. But the greatness of God's mercy to Jonah had receded into the background of his mind. He had forgotten very quickly. The most amazing thing in the Bible, you know, is that the memory of God's people is very short. You would ask, how could you forget if you lived three days in a fish's belly? How

*...may Father's mercies
soften our foolish, proud,
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could you forget that salvation is, indeed, of the Lord's mercy? Yet Jonah forgot. Do not shake your head at Jonah. Think of your own heart. How soon do you forget that everything that you are and have is of the Lord's mercy. Oh, the

Now, Jonah, I am God. I have willed, says Jehovah to him, 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 were in Nineveh. There were 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

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 short-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.

magnitude of that mercy! How quickly we forget that mercy of God.

That applies also with regard to our reactions and thoughts toward others and patience for others in the church and willingness to understand others. We become quick to judge, quick to put the deeds, words, and actions of others in a bad light. Are you very quick to get mad and irritated at another person, maybe that child, that husband or wife? Jonah, you who have received everything of mercy from God, doest thou well to be angry? You, who have received abundance of grace and mercy through Jesus Christ, do you do well to be angry?

Jonah's anger expressed itself in two ways. First of all, there was a petulant prayer. Jonah's anger expressed itself in prayer (Jonah 4:2), “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.” Now, we must commend the prophet that, in his anger, he had sense enough to pray. That was better than what he had done before. Before he just turned foot and ran. But that is as far as we can go to commend him. This is not

a spiritual prayer. It may use high-sounding words, but it was a churlish, peevish, petulant prayer. It is not a prayer to copy. It is a prayer here in the Scriptures for admonition—do not pray *this* way.

What was Jonah saying? He was saying this: “Lord, when the command came to me first, I refused to obey because I knew that thy very nature was merciful. I had seen that in Israel. And I had a strong suspicion that if I went to Nineveh I would be used as an instrument of Thy sovereign mercy to Thy children there. I knew that Thou art merciful. That was stamped in the history of Israel way back to Mount Sinai when Moses pleaded Thy mercy for rebellious people. And I had this nagging suspicion that now, out of the Ninevites who are Israel's *enemies*, out of those pagans, out of those barbarians, out of *those* people, national enemies of Israel, out of them Thou would show purposes of sheer mercy and make them one church in Jesus Christ. And what I feared would happen did happen. I have a gripe. I'm angry that Thou hast done this!” Jonah does not like certain people. He has these people summed up. They are not like us in Israel. We are God's people. They are whatever. Their ancestors were cannibals. Mercy should not be shown to them. So he went on to pray, “Therefore, O LORD, take,

I beseech thee, my life from me; for it is better for me to die than to live.”

Now that is shocking and shameful. Jonah is digging in his heels against God and saying, “If it’s going to be this way, I’d rather be dead.” That is terrible! The pain that we have when we hear those words should not simply be from a distance, saying, “Jonah, what’s the matter with you? How dare you talk like that?” But the pain should be directed to ourselves. That is how stubborn, foolish, obstinent, and shamefully self-willed we are when we say, “OK, can’t do anything about it? That’s the will of the Lord? I don’t like it. But don’t ask me to accept and submit to it. I’d just as soon die then, if that’s the way it’s going to be.” Have you ever said that? Jonah said, “I would rather die than see mercy shown to those Gentiles who are Israel’s enemies. Just take me out of this, then.” Jonah should have been down among the repentant Ninevites. He should have been down among their streets saying, “Yes, the Lord is merciful to awful sinners, isn’t He? I’m an awful sinner, and you see now your sins. Isn’t the mercy of God wonderful?” But instead, his narrow heart causes him to miss it all. His narrow heart shuts the door to the blessings all around him. There the people of Nineveh are brought to repentance by

sheer mercy. They are hungry and teachable for the Word of God. They probably could not get enough. “Tell us more, Jonah. We have to know more of this wonderful truth of the mercies of the sovereign and eternal God.” But instead, the prophet, who should have been down teaching, is all bitter, closed up in heart, resentful, because he thought he knew who should receive God’s mercy and who should not, and because he thought the mercy of God was owed to him but not to others.

So we read that “Jonah went out of the city, and sat on the east side of the city and there made him a booth, and sat under it in the shadow, till he might see what would become of the city.” Jonah left the city. He went to the east side, where the sun would rise behind him and lighten the city in front of him. And he builds a little lean-to, a booth, with the sides open and boards overhead to protect him from the sun, to see what would become of the city. Forty days have come and gone. Jehovah has repented of the evil that He said He would do, but let’s wait and see! Maybe in a week or two they will go back to where they were. Maybe it was just an emotional thing with them. Maybe their pagan training and former life is going to win out — the old urges of plunder will conquer them. It is almost as if Jonah is a spiritual sadist.

Jonah that we read that Jonah was glad about something. He was 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 then 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, from Jonah’s perspective, insult to injury, 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. And Jonah was given, then, 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

well-framed question from life can have tremendous influence on a distraught spirit. When all of your reasoning seems to be ineffectual and all of your words seem to go nowhere, 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? You are angry, resentful, bitter against another person. You are 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 My presence?”

But then God continued. We read that God prepared a gourd, which grew up quickly. In verse 6, “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 exceedingly 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

*God’s questions are
some of the strongest means
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sinful-self rebellion.*

Perhaps God will then come down and consume them as I wanted at first.

He is not as Jeremiah the prophet. Jeremiah had prophesied of a judgment of God upon Judah. And Judah did not repent. What was Jeremiah’s response? It was much closer to what it should be, Jeremiah 17:16: “As for me, I have not hastened from being a pastor to follow thee: neither have I desired the woeful day; thou knowest: that which came out of my lips was right before thee.” But Jonah? Jonah went out to pout and to wait to see if, perhaps, the repentance was only surface deep and if, at last, the city would receive the judgment that he thought it ought to get.

What does that say to us? It says for sure that we must see what miserable creatures we are as children of God when we are left to the dominating influence of any remaining sin. Jonah is a child of God. He is a regenerated, sanctified man. But he is the record of one who has remaining sin in him — a besetting sin, a sin that clung to him in a fish’s belly, and a sin that, when he did not take it seriously and crucify it and fight it unto blood, would bring him exceedingly low. For Jonah, his besetting sin was religious bigotry. It was pride, a twisting of the idea of mercy that somehow he deserved it and others did not.

It plagued him. He struggled with it. He prayed against it. But when he let down his guard and stood on his own, it came back full-blown. Then, what a miserable man he was. That one sin produced one sin after another. Here is a holy prophet. But when he is left to himself, one unmortified sin makes him a shameful, miserable sinner.

Now Jonah is not the only example of this in the Bible. Think of David, a man after God’s own heart, the sweet psalmist of Israel. When he came under the predominating influence of one sin, his own lust, what happened? Adultery, murder, and horrible lies—destruction to his own family. Trace it out. It began as a young man, soon after marriage. He began to take more wives. He had been anointed king after Saul. God had said in Deuteronomy 17:17 to the king: “Neither shall he multiply wives to himself, that his heart turn not away.” But David multiplied wives. He began to be a connoisseur of fine female flesh. He catered, he fed, he nurtured his lust in him. He did not fight it. He did not try to crush it. As he fought against the Philistines, he knew what to do with a Philistine in front of him—kill him, crush him! But his own lust? He did not fight his own lust that way. Then one night, though he had six wives, he said, Why not a seventh? Why even bother about her being my

wife? Why should it concern me that she is another man's wife? I can have him killed. And the man after God's own heart became a beast. Why? Because of unmortified sin.

Do you hear the Word of God? Whatever besetting sin you and I choose to leave alone because we think it is too hard to fight and we can declare a truce with it, whatever it is, beware. You might say, "Well, I'll decide to leave it alone if it leaves me alone." But it is not going to leave you alone. Maybe that sin is not obvious. It may be the envy in you as a young girl. It may be jealousy. It may be covetousness. It may be the belief that this thing—this house, this car, this dress—is *all* you need to make you happy. It may be ambition. It may be the desire that, oh, I have to get ahead. It may be that you are subject to making uncharitable judgments or you are selfish. Whatever it is, if you allow it to be left alone, God alone knows what it may lead you to do. Leave no unguarded place, no besetting sin, unbattled within you. That is the lesson of the book of Jonah. Watch and pray, said Jesus, for ye know not what hour ye shall enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.

How compassionate, then, we ought to be with others when we know this about ourselves.

Do not stand throwing stones at Jonah. If you are left to yourself, or I am, we are exactly like him.

A child of God is like a person soaked with fuel oil, walking through a burning building. If he gets out, it is because God has watched over him. Do you understand that? There is no sin you could not commit and no depth to which you could not go, but for the grace of God. But behold the wonderful mercy of God.

Jonah was angry at God. How dare He? But God is sovereign in His mercy. And God is going to deal with this prophet and bend his knee in repentance and in love for him. God's mercy to salvation is an unconditional mercy, that is, it is not dependent on or caused by the one He chooses to save. It is undeserved. And if you want proof of that, then, child of God, look upon yourself. Everyone who has received the mercy of God is a proof that God's mercy is totally undeserved. Let us humbly thank Him. Let us rejoice in Jesus Christ, and let us look to the greater than Jonah, our Lord Jesus Christ, and put our trust in Him.

Let us pray.

Father, we thank Thee for Thy Word, and we pray for its blessing upon our heart. Through Jesus Christ we pray, Amen.

THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR

September 21, 2014
No. 3742

God's Rebuke of a Pouting Prophet
Rev. Carl Haak

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. 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, in verse 4, to Jonah 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 his booth, with a probing question: "Dost thou well to be angry?" Literally, "Is thy anger a righteous thing?" That was a very well-framed question. A