

The Duty Is Ours, the Outcome is God's

Genesis 6:1-8 and Jonah 1:1-3

by Phil Kayser

This past week I heard a story that I researched on truthorfiction.com and four other myth buster websites, and it appears that the story I am about to relate is 100% true. Larry Walters was a truck driver bored with life in Los Angeles and wanting to do something significant. He wanted his life to count. On July 2, 1982 he tied 41 four-foot helium balloons in four layers to a patio chair that he dubbed, Inspiration I. Here's a close-up picture of this amazing flying machine just before he launched. Here's a color picture of it after the landing. He says that he was rejected by the Airforce because of his bad eyesight, but some people wonder if it was because he was a brick shy of a full load. Anyway, he was hoping to float anywhere from 30-100 feet above the ground and control the height by dumping ballast or shooting balloons with his pellet gun. But when the tethers were cut he shot up in the air so fast that his glasses fell off and he about fell out of the chair. It was like he was being shot out of a canon, rising at over 1000 feet per minute. He hung on for dear life, and when things settled down, he was being carried along in a cold wind current at 16,000 feet. Since he was near the LA and Long Beach airports, there were planes flying over and under him. In fact, that's how we found out what height he was at. Both a Delta and a TWA pilot reported that they had just passed a crazy guy in a lawn chair at 16000 feet. With the tough time he was having staying in the chair, he was afraid to shoot the balloons, thinking that the imbalance might tip the chair over, so he floated for several hours. He was calling MayDay on his CB radio that he was getting cold, numb and lightheaded. Fearing that a jet would get him, he started shooting the balloons but accidentally dropped his gun due to sudden loss of balance. Eventually he descended and got hung up in high power electric lines where he dangled five feet above the ground and was finally able to climb out. He wasn't electrocuted, so he doesn't qualify for the Darwin awards, but he was arrested when he climbed out of the chair. Regional safety inspector Neal Savoy is reported to have said "We know he broke some part of the Federal Aviation Act, and as soon as we decide which part it is, some type of charge will be filed." He was fined \$4000 for breaking four aviation rules. But by the next year he was able to negotiate that down to three rules broken and \$1500.

When he was arrested a newspaper reporter asked him why in the world he had done such a crazy stunt and his only reply was, "A man can't just sit around." And I thought that was an interesting statement: a man can't

just sit around. He had come to realize that watching soap operas and going through the daily grind of those on the ground in LA simply couldn't give him significance in life. There was something in him that wanted to rise above all that. What he failed to realize is that his stunt and his new life as a motivational speaker and celebrity (at least a celebrity as a nut-case) didn't give him significance either. After 10 years he committed suicide. But this had been his dream all his life. He said, "I didn't think that by fulfilling my goal in life — my dream — that I would create such a stir and make people laugh."

What is your dream in life? What is your goal? Is it something that you will be proud of 50 years from now? What makes you feel fulfilled and significant? Or do you even have a drive to be different and to transcend the boring rat race of life? We've just come off a series of meetings with Peter Hammond and I think most of us recognize that here is a man who really knows what he wants to do. Even when he's having fun with his children he knows what he wants to accomplish in life. In the USA, the average number of hours that a person watches TV is four hours and twenty five minutes. Japan is the only country that has a higher rate, averaging four additional minutes. In a survey in 72 countries, the average world-wide was three hours and thirty nine minutes. This is a mind-boggling waste of time. What is it that drives you away from the TV and into doing something productive? Hopefully it's a better motivation than Larry Walters had. But at least he realized something that many people do not: he realized that a man can't just sit around. Your life will be a failure if you just sit around like the majority in LA did. But it will be just as much a failure if you (like Larry Walters) are seeking thrills, praise, fame or fortune. How can our life count for time and count for eternity? If the results alone make our lives significant, then Noah was a failure. Well, not a total failure, because he did save his family, didn't he. So he did have some results. But he had been preaching his heart out to that generation with no success. Jonah on the other hand didn't want to preach his heart out to Nineveh, and yet God gave him unbelievable outward success. I want to use these two Scriptures to show that Noah and Jonah found success by realizing two things: 1) a man can't just sit around. It took awhile for Jonah to appreciate that. But we're not created to just sit around. When we see a world that is going down the tubes, we must do something about it. And we must do something no matter how far our society has fallen. And may God stir up within us a desire to make a difference. 2) Second, we can't find our significance in the reactions of others when we try to make a difference. Our sense of joy, fulfillment and significance must come from serving and pleasing the Lord, or as Hebrews

11 words it, by living a life of faith.

Let's look first at the life of Noah. When he preached his heart out to a world who wouldn't listen, he may have seemed as crazy as Larry Walters. And even from hindsight we might think, "Why did he bother?" But I think Noah was convinced of Cromwell's statement that the duty is ours and the results are God's. Ecclesiastes 12:13-14 sums up life in a nutshell. It says,

Ecclesiastes 12:13 ¶ Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter:

Fear God and keep His commandments,

For this is man's all.

Ecclesiastes 12:14 For God will bring every work into judgment,

Including every secret thing,

Whether good or evil.

Let's look first at how difficult the situation was that Noah was facing.

I. The Warning of Genesis 6

A. *Compromise and loss of antithesis (vv. 1-2) As "sons of God" they should have known better*

Let's read verses 1-2: **Now it came to pass, when men began to multiply on the face of the earth, and daughters were born to them, that the sons of God saw the daughters of men, that they were beautiful; and they took wives for themselves of all whom they chose.**

This morning I'm not going to bother to settle the question of who are these sons of God and daughters of men; and who were the giants in the land. I personally believe that the sons of God were believing men (from the line of Seth) taking unbelieving women as their brides. But on any of the five interpretations, it is clear that there was major compromise with sin and there was a lack of antithesis. And it was specifically compromise in the area of romance. Now God could have highlighted any number of other ways in which God's people compromised, but the compromises related to romance are perhaps the strongest and most visible. These men were not making decisions based on law, but rather on desire. They did not allow God to choose, they chose themselves. They did not follow biblical qualifications for a spouse, they simply married from physical attraction. And so strong were the attractions that they were willing to marry unbelievers.

Now is that so different from what happens in the church today? There is a rash of believers dating and marrying unbelievers. And there is a rash of compromises in the sexual arena. I was shocked to see the numbers

of teenagers who watch pornography regularly. And many people don't even see what they are doing as being compromised. According to a large study done by Josh McDowell, 55.7 % of Christian teens are sexually active with teens that they date. 55.7%!!! And we're not talking about people getting married. We are talking about recreational dating. Is that not seeing the daughters of men that they are beautiful and taking as many women as they choose? In a sense, I think it is.

Nor is the lack of antithesis (or difference between believers and unbelievers) simply in the sexual arena. And there could be any number of reasons why this is the case. I think one reason is that most Christians don't want to be mocked like Larry Walters was. They don't want to be seen as a nut case. It is a pretty small minority of people who like to stand out from the crowd as looking weird. There are a few who wear hundreds of tattoos and piercings and are proud of it, but for the most part, people don't want to stand out from the crowd. In fact, nowadays, the reason there are so many piercings is because it has become the in thing and people don't want to stand out from the crowd.

So we've got two humanistic answers to sin. Let's look at some examples of the difference between the humanism of Larry Walters and the humanism of the rest of the crowd. How do people deal with the temptations of sex and lust of the heart? There are some who try to transcend the world like Larry Walters in their own strength. I would put into this category Saudi's who make their women wear a sack over their heads and everything is covered in a shapeless cloth. There are monks who have abandoned society and joined a monastery, or nuns who have done the same thing in a nunnery thinking that this will please God; this will transcend the way the world acts. Most people look at those solutions as weird and react in the opposite direction (unfortunately) by dressing like the world, dating like the world, watching movies like the world and hoping that they will still be strong enough to resist in heart and in action and stand above the crowd (while they don't look like they are standing above the crowd). My encouragement to you is to transcend the world – *but to do it in a Biblical way*. Oh, sure, people will still lump you in with the nutcases if you dress modestly or reject the dating model or refuse to watch certain movies. They will label you as legalistic, not hip, so yesterday, so Larry Walters, etc. But our focus should not be on what a world going to hell will think, but on what the God of glory thinks. He thinks the rags Saudi women are forced to wear are degrading, but he also thinks that American women are immodest. And I would challenge you to get your definition of antithesis from the Bible and the Bible alone. Isaiah says, **To the law and to the testimony. If they do**

not speak according to this Word, it is because there is no light in them. Neither pagan culture nor pagan counterculture should be the defining mark upon your life. Let's be a *Christian* counterculture. And let's not worry that the world thinks it weird for Noah to build an ark when no ark seems necessary. Let's not worry about the response to our counter-cultural preaching. Let's simply be faithful like Noah was.

B. *Resisting the Spirit ("strive" v. 3)*

The second thing that we see in this passage is the way in which the world resisted the Holy Spirit, or rather, the way that the Holy Spirit resisted them. Any time a person sins, the Spirit resists him or her – at least initially. Now you may have assumed that the only people that the Spirit strives with are Christians, but Jesus said this about the Spirit. **And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment:** (John 16:8) Just as the Holy Spirit strove with those men in Genesis, God's Spirit strives with pagans today. He brings conviction in three areas: conviction of sin, conviction of righteousness and conviction of judgment. In other words, the Holy Spirit lets people know what is wrong, what is right and that they won't get away with what they are doing. When you are witnessing, this is a wonderful truth to be aware of. We are at an advantage. Even when unbeliever's scoff at us, initially we have the Spirit on our side convicting them of the wickedness of what they are doing and of the truth of what we are saying. People's consciences bother them. And its through the speech of people like Noah that the Spirit works.

Here too we can go to extremes. 1 Peter warns us of two extremes. One extreme is to be so nice that you just fit in with the crowd. The other is to be so personally weird and offensive that the world doesn't hear the message of Christ. I know people like that. They are a turn-off, not because of the message, but because of their meanness. Peter says, if they mock, make sure it is a godly lifestyle and godly words that they are mocking, not simply your adversarial personality.

C. *Resistance to the Spirit no longer needed ("My Spirit shall not strive with men forever")*

But (third) when these people in Genesis resisted the Spirit long enough, eventually, He left them alone, and their consciences become hardened. Or as Romans 1 words it, He gave them up to a depraved mind. It's the first stage of judgment. And in our society, we are witnessing this stage of God's judgment. People no longer have the ability to blush over perversion. They are no longer troubled by it. And when they are not troubled, it means that the Spirit is no longer striving with them. Now *that's*

a scary thought, isn't it? Verse 3: **And the LORD said, "My Spirit shall not strive with man forever..."** And the reason that the Spirit gives up is not that He has no ability to change their hearts. It's not because *man* is so strong and powerful. On the contrary, verse 3 says, **for he is indeed flesh...** Or as some translate that, "for he is indeed mortal." Men are weak. God could change them, but He is not obligated to. And we must never presume upon His grace.

But here's my point – Noah continued to preach his heart out and to try to make a difference right up to the day they went into the ark. It's not up to us to determine when to quit on a society. We will be seeing later that Nineveh was in as bad of shape as this crowd was, yet God regenerated and changed them. Our's is the duty, the results are God's.

D. Countdown to judgment (v. 3f)

Fourth, this passage speaks of a countdown to judgment. Verse 3 goes on to say, **yet his days shall be one hundred and twenty years.** God was giving a countdown till the flood. This gave Noah and his sons 120 years to build that ark, but it also gave 120 years for the people to repent. 2 Peter 2:12 calls Noah a preacher of righteousness. He preached to these people. He brought the law to bear in the lives of his generation just as Jonah (1500 years later) would bring the law to bear against the wickedness of the Assyrians. God converted the Assyrians and he failed to convert the pagans here. Instead that preaching simply heaped judgment upon judgment on those wicked people. And there were other preachers of righteousness leading up to the flood like Enoch who warned of judgment according to Jude. Can you see how Noah was avoiding humanistic accommodation and humanistic reactionism? It's not enough to say, "A man can't sit around forever." We must take action even when there is a count down to judgment, but our actions must flow from Scripture, not from what the world thinks might work.

E. Increasing rebellion against God's order (v. 4)

But things continued to get worse in verse 4. What happens here is that people continue to reject the law and as their consciences become harder, their wickedness automatically becomes greater. Verse 4 says, **There were giants on the earth in those days, and also afterward, when the sons of God came in to the daughters of men and they bore children to them. Those were the mighty men who were of old, men of renown.** Some people read genetic engineering or rather genetic breeding of giants. I don't think you have to read it that way. But in any case, they persevered in their compromises and raised a generation noted as giants by men, but as ungodly by God. It shows the inevitable downward slide of a society when

God does not put the brakes on.

F. *Unrestrained sin (v. 5)*

The succeeding generations threw off all restraint in verse 5, where it says: **Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.** That is a sad description of the progress of sin. By the way, when we say that everyone is totally depraved, we do not mean that everyone is as bad as they can get. It means that the totality of a man's being is affected by sin: his mind, will, emotions, spirit, body, conscience – it is all marred by sin. But when total depravity is not held in check by the Holy Spirit's restraining grace it will always become increasingly more depraved. Even amongst demons, according to Matthew 12:45, there are some demons who are more wicked than other demons. So totally depraved beings can become more and more wicked. And that is what is happening here. There is an unhindered downward slide until they are filled to the brim with wickedness.

G. *God's grief & wrath (vv. 6-7) make the culture beyond restoration*

Then in verses 6-7 we have God's grief and wrath being poured out upon a culture that is beyond restoration. There comes a point of no return; a point when there can be no repentance. **And the LORD was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart.** Don't ever think that God is indifferent to what is going on in this world. We may become used to it, but not God. Though God is sovereign, He is holy; though He is all knowing, He is still grieved. And God is grieved over the state of America today. He's grieved over the humanistic reactionaries who show rebel hearts and He's grieved over those who fit into culture and show their man-pleasing heart.

Verse 7 describes His subsequent wrath: **So the LORD said, "I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth, both man and beast, creeping thing and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them."** And so we have a description of the first possible outcome for America: total, irretrievable judgment.

H. *But God maintained a remnant (v. 8)*

Yet even in the midst of this great apostasy, verse 8 says, **But Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD.** He found grace to have an antithesis. He found grace to worship as he should. He found grace to raise his family in a godly way. He found grace to educate his children in a radical Christian counter-culture. And I guarantee you, he didn't send his kids to the

government schools. He found grace to be holy. He found grace to preach righteousness against his culture. He rose above his culture – not in a balloon, but in God’s grace. And according to the New Testament, he was faithful to bring his prophetic rebuke against his generation.

Would that have been discouraging? Yes. But it was what he was called to do. He was called to be faithful and to leave the results up to God. And if he had given up preaching, and given up raising his family in a different way, and given up maintaining an antithesis simply because it seemed so hopeless to have high standards, he would not only have lost his culture, he would have lost his family. The keeping of his family was a victory. The keeping of his testimony was a victory.

And we too are called to be faithful, not successful in the eyes of the world. And this I believe is the problem with many forms of incrementalism – they are trying to win the victory by adopting point number A – compromise. Antithesis seems too radical to many Christians. They think, “No one will listen to us if we shoot for the stars and give an uncompromised message. We’ll be like Noah – a political failure.” Just keep in mind that Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord. Unfortunately, many modern Christian politicians think they are wiser than Noah, and they will trade votes with the heathen. They will vote for a pagan’s pet ungodly, unconstitutional project if that pagan will sign on to the Christian’s pet project – as if trading a sin for a righteous act is somehow good!! You see, even though he was won on one issue, he has lost the battle because he has shown to everyone that he has no absolutes – no principles that apply to all of life. We used to have statesmen in Congress who were used to being on the losing side of votes over and over again, but who over time gained credibility for their courage, their faithfulness, their consistency and their unwillingness to compromise – people like Larry McDonald in the 80’s. We need more such statesmen.

Noah was such a statesman. It looked like he didn’t win any of the votes, but in God’s eyes, he won the battle. If we give up because we can’t see the success, we have lost everything. If we compromise because antithesis has no hope of success, we have lost everything. Our generation desperately needs men like Noah with prophetic courage. We don’t need Christian politicians who want to win with worldly methods and worldly compromise. If the first step to supposedly winning the battle means compromise and erasing the antithesis, then we have lost the battle of our culture before we have begun.

OK. That’s one side of the equation: a man who had the moral courage and the conviction to stand strong even when no one was buying it.

He was willing to be confused with Larry Walters, but he was not willing to be a Larry Walters. He was willing to be called a nut by the world, but he was unwilling to trade God's true wisdom for man's wisdom in order to escape from that false charge. And that is a strong challenge to us. Are we willing to stand firm for truth even if it means we will have no success? Even if it means we will be mocked? I think we need to do that in education, politics, business and in everything.

II. The Hope of Jonah 3:1-8

A. *Assyria was a nation of incredible wickedness (1:2; see Nahum)*

But for the second side of the equation, let's turn to the book of Jonah. Jonah too was a preacher of righteousness, but he was a reluctant preacher. He didn't want to preach to the world, even if it would mean success. But God finally humbled him, and once he did preach, he preached without any compromise of the message. Unfortunately, his attitudes were wrong, and he wasn't grieved over Nineveh's imminent destruction like Noah was grieved. In fact, he was hoping for the destruction. So his attitudes were quite different from Noah's. And are these not the three attitudes that you find within the church? There are those who grieve over America like Noah grieved over his world. There are those who are indifferent to America's demise. And there are those who want to blast America to hell sooner than God does. But I found something rather surprising in Philippians 1. God says that he would rather have a bad attitude person who is trying to make a difference and is telling the unvarnished truth – He prefers those bad-attitude truth-tellers to the indifferent Christians who are fitting in. Let me read that: Philippians 1:12-18.

Philippians 1:12 ¶ But I want you to know, brethren, that the things which happened to me [that was being thrown into jail in Rome. “that the things which have happened to me...”] have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel,

Philippians 1:13 so that it has become evident to the whole palace guard, and to all the rest, that my chains are in Christ;

Philippians 1:14 and most of the brethren in the Lord, having become confident by my chains, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.

Philippians 1:15 ¶ Some indeed preach Christ even from envy and strife [OK? Those are the guys with the bad attitudes. They haven't learned how to win friends and influence people. “Some indeed preach Christ even from

envy and strife”], and some also from goodwill:

Philippians 1:16 The former preach Christ from selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my chains;

Philippians 1:17 but the latter out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel.

Philippians 1:18 What then? Only *that* in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is preached; and in this I rejoice, yes, and will rejoice. To me this shows that truth held the supreme place in Paul’s life.

Because Jonah’s antithesis was the same as Noah’s and because he was utterly uncompromising in his message, he too was faithful, despite his bad attitude. We will look at the difference in results in a moment. Jonah had phenomenal success in changing that culture, But the results right now are irrelevant. What is important as far as God was concerned was the message. He told Jonah just as he had told Noah, to preach the message and leave the results in His hands. The duty is ours, the outcome God’s. Apply that to the political realm and I think you’ll see that we have some adjustments to make.

And we should probably give a little background on why Jonah was so upset with the Ninevites. You know the story. God tells him to preach to Nineveh that they will be judged in 40 days because of their horrible wickedness. Jonah knows that when the Word is preached, people often repent, and if there is repentance, God will not judge Assyria. It’s a universal principle articulated in Jeremiah 18 that when God speaks judgment against a nation and they repent, God will always relent of the judgment. There is always hope for a nation when there is repentance because God is the only one who can give that repentance. Jonah hated Assyria, and didn’t want Assyria to repent. He complained to God that if he preaches, Assyria might repent and then judgment won’t come. But he wants them dead.

Some people have thought that he was just a racist. I think that is a total misinterpretation of the situation. He was not racist against the Phoenician sailors even though they were of a different race. In fact, he spared their lives, when he didn’t have to. He taught them and it resulted in their salvation – and their worshipping the one true God.

I don’t think he was a racist. Look at chapter 3:8. I think there is a hint here. This verse is part of the king of Nineveh’s decree for repentance. **But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily to God; yes, let every one turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands.** The king picks out evil way and violence. Now if you read Nahum and you look at the Biblical and the archeological evidence of that

time you will find that the evil and the violence were horrifying. If you have ever watched Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom, think of the bad people in that movie and then multiply it several fold, and you get a little bit of a good feel for why Jonah was upset. These people glorified torture and were fixated on torture.

Jonah had no doubt witnessed the cruel torture and slow deaths of friends and family members. Burned into his memory were the screams of tortured children as the Assyrians laughed. Every time the Assyrians came to his mind his emotions churned with the memory of ghastly, demonic cruelty. *Now can you sympathize with him?* I tell you, if I was there, I might have been in the same boots as Jonah. It would take a great deal to heal Jonah of this pain and to enable him to come to the place where he could love his enemy. There are hints in this book that by the time he wrote the book he had forgiven the Assyrians and that he had learned how to overcome evil with good. God step by step draws him out of his depressive behavior.

But my point in bringing this up is that Nineveh had degenerated into sadism and sexual perversity. They were like earth in Genesis 6. I won't get into the details of the sexual perversity. It was like Genesis 6. And it wasn't Jonah's attitudes, nor was it his being liked by the Assyrians that measured his obedience. It was boldly proclaiming the truth; it was boldly maintaining an antithesis; a difference between himself and them. There were no gray areas. Some of you get on the case of Christians who are overly critical and are acting like Jonah, and I can understand that. But you ought to be getting on the case of those who are indifferent even more. And it says something about us when we are more satisfied with people who don't want to rock the boat than we are with people who just can't stand to sit around any longer. I can understand the anger and bitterness and bad attitudes of Christians who can't stand sitting around any longer, but I can't understand people who are willing to sit around indifferent to the unconstitutional and unbiblical things being done in both the Republican and Democratic parties. I'd much rather have Jonah than apathy.

B. But Jonah brought a clearcut message (3:1-4)

Look at Jonah 3:1-4. **Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the second time, saying, "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and preach to it the message that I tell you." So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD.** [Not according as he thought it would work; or what they might be willing to accept; or *part* of the word. But he did it exactly as God wanted it said. "according to the word of the LORD."] **Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, a**

three-day journey in extent. [This emphasizes how impossible the task seemed to be. One man speaking against a monstrous city. Chapter 4:11 says that there were 120,000 toddlers who could tell the difference between their right hand and their left hand yet. 120,000 infants means that this was a huge city. How in the world is Jonah going to make any difference? Well, it really doesn't matter. His is the duty, the results are God's.

And God has frequently used similar odds to achieve his purposes. Athanasius stood against the world and against the emperor for truth even when friends told him that it was useless. There were people who thought he was a nut. We don't remember them; we remember Athanasius. Martin Luther stood against the emperor against the advice of many of his friends who didn't want him to rock the boat. A little girl in Syria during an earlier age was able to turn the heart of Naaman and eventually king Benhadad. Anyway, back to verse 4] **And Jonah began to enter the city on the first day's walk. Then he cried out and said, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!"** I would have been scared to death to bring that message. Talk about the pressure of being all alone. When people stand in Congress and speak up against popular opinion, they say it makes you feel small, vulnerable, and sometimes to feel like an idiot. And it doesn't matter that you know you are right. You feel so tempted to compromise and soften the message. You don't want to be the odd ball; you don't want to be a Larry Walters; and the pressure to compromise is so great. But Jonah (perhaps for the wrong reasons) did not compromise. Praise God!

C. And it resulted in a Great Awakening (3:5-10)

And it miraculously resulted in a Great Awakening in that city. Verses 5-10. **So the people of Nineveh believed God** [and if you read Matthew 12:41 you will see that Jesus says that this was a genuine faith and repentance. Christ indicates that they were soundly converted. "So the people of Nineveh believed God"], **proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest to the least of them.** [Could God convert the Mayor, the City Council, the County Commissioners and every judge in our city? Could this city be changed overnight? Absolutely, yes it could. And actually, there have been cities converted and turned upside down almost overnight since the death of Jesus. It can happen. Look at verses 6-10] **Then word came to the king of Nineveh; and he arose from his throne and laid aside his robe, covered himself with sackcloth and sat in ashes. And he caused it to be proclaimed and published throughout Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying, "Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything; do not let them eat, or drink water. But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily to God;**

yes, let every one turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands. Who can tell if God will turn and relent, and turn away from His fierce anger, so that we may not perish.” Then God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God relented from the disaster that He had said He would bring upon them, and He did not do it. If they turned from their evil ways, this means that there was a thorough going cultural transformation in his city kingdom. It was not an empty faith; it was a life-transforming faith. It wasn't a conversion like modern evangelicals profess. It was genuine; it was culture-changing. And I won't spend more time on Jonah because I think the point is fairly obvious. Our sights need to be higher when we engage our culture. We need to use the strategies of the Bible, not the strategies of the world. But I would like to end by giving several lessons as we enter this election season.

D. And God did not give them what they deserved, but had mercy on them (4:10-11)

III. Lessons we can learn

A. Avoid reactionary humanism just as much as go along with the flow humanism. They are both humanism that is distasteful to God.

The first lesson is that both Noah and Jonah avoided reactionary humanism just as much as they avoided go-along-with the flow humanism. Don't think that God is on the side of American humanistic conservatism because it has borrowed a few values from the Christian worldview, but has done so by secularizing the values and rejecting God and Bible in their debates. God doesn't take sides in the Republican and Democratic debates. He expects them to take sides with Him. We are not ambassadors for a political party; we are ambassadors for God. God isn't simply interested in slowing down humanism. His cause is to overthrow humanism. He can do so by judgment (as he did in the days of Noah – in which case He is glorified) or He can do so by conversion (as He did in the days of Jonah, and be glorified that way too). So we need to oppose humanism wherever it is found.

B. See the casting off of God's laws as being a serious thing in America; we must take action.

The second lesson is that the statistics that I started the sermon off with ought to scare the daylights out of us. Our nation is in serious trouble, and since judgment begins in the house of God, our churches are in serious trouble. And I think that we must try to do everything that we can to turn both church and nation back to God. Some Christians will try to marginalize

you when you try to bring the pure message of the Word and tell you to get real and focus on issues we *can* win. Some might even accuse you of legalism, or of being cultic, if you press home the claims of God's law. Calvin has had more influence on the world than just about any other man, yet he is still maligned to this day. Don't worry about what they are thinking. The grave danger that confronts us is too serious to worry about niceties of what other people think. We must bring back God's law to our nation. We must be preachers of righteousness.

C. *We can never presume upon God's mercy ("My Spirit shall not always strive with man.")*

Third, never presume upon God's mercy. Genesis 6 says, **My Spirit shall not always strive with man.** We never know when God has had *so* much that He gives a nation up to judgment. This too should stir us out of apathy and make us realize that a godly man can't just sit around forever.

D. *Without the Spirit's restraint, our nation will continue to produce increasingly wicked men*

Fourth, superficial changes are not enough. Apart from God's Spirit convicting men and restraining men, our attempts at restraints will be hopeless. It will be as ineffective as Noah's constant preaching of righteousness. This should make us see prayer as being the first and primary defense against the slide into oblivion. Without the Spirit's restraint, our nation will produce more and more notoriously wicked men – giants in wickedness. The slide is accelerating. This is not simply a political battle. America must be won on our knees as well as through action.

E. *We must resist with the teaching of the law (as did Noah and Jonah) and leave the results in God's hands.*

Fifth, we must resist with the teaching of the law (as did Noah and Jonah) and leave the results in God's hands. If it comes to preaching with the sincerity of Noah or preaching with the insincerity of Jonah, I would rather have Noah's preaching. I think it more honored Christ. But I would far rather have Jonah's bold (but bad-attitude) preaching in our nation than the mealy mouthed compromising that many Christians opt for. Keep in mind Philippians 1:18. For Paul, faithfulness in bringing the truth to bear in Caesar's palace was more important than love and the clothing that the truth was wrapped in. He didn't want the truth compromised, and neither should we.

F. *Faithfulness is more important than success*

And so point F says, "Faithfulness is more important than success." If

God wants us to speak to our nation with the lack of success that Noah had, so be it. Let's speak the truth eloquently, fully and perseveringly. If God wants us to speak the truth and have overnight success like Jonah had, so be it. Ours is not to guess the future. That is impossible. Ours is to be faithful, to vote faithfully, to raise our children faithfully; to influence other evangelicals faithfully. Ours is the duty; the outcome belong in God's hands. And yet there are so many Christians who gauge their actions in politics based only on what they think is possible. Even when outstanding candidates are available, they will vote for an ungodly candidate who has been promising to do unconstitutional things. And their excuse is – "He's the better of two evils. Well, that doesn't fly with me when the guy you are voting for has already promised to violate his oath of office to uphold the constitution. He's a tyrant. And their justification for voting for the lesser of two tyrants is that the two good candidates are unelectable. And my response is this: "Is it not an honorable thing to be faithful like Noah and lose the popular vote?" I think it is. And secondly, "Can God not do a miracle as He did in the days of Jonah?" Duty is ours, the results are God's. When we get involved in politics we must be driven more by duty than guesses of what may or may not happen in the future. So this lesson is that faithfulness is much more important than success.

G. It is possible to walk with God even in the midst of a wicked nation. It is possible to have a godly family, even in the midst of perversion.

And then finally, it is possible to walk with God even in the midst of a wicked nation. It's possible to raise your children to be modest, serious, holy and devoted to the Lord. Though the world has adversely affected the church, it need not. If we will seek by God's grace to maintain an antithesis ourselves, to keep sensitive to the Spirit's promptings and to determine to hate what God hates, to be grieved over what He is grieved over and to love what He loves, He is able to keep us from stumbling. That's the great promise in Jude 24: **Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy.**

Obviously, our desire is to see Omaha and our nation transformed, and to see the church made holy and pure, and we will do all that we can to promote that. But even if we have no outward success, we can be joyful if we find grace in His eyes and remain in that grace. My admonition to you is to transcend the world, not through humanism, but by God's grace. Amen.

Children of God: I charge you to make a difference in this upcoming election.

Don't be like men who just sit around their whole lives. Transcend what is happening by a radical commitment to God, His Word and His grace. Amen.