

The Disobedient Disciple

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[0 : 00] If we could this evening for a short while, we could turn back to that portion of scripture that we read. We'll book up Jonah and Jonah chapter 1.

And if we read again just the first three verses. Jonah chapter 1 from the beginning.

Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the son of Amitya saying, Arise go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it, for the evil has come up before me.

But Jonah rose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. He went down to Joppa and found a ship going to Tarshish. So he paid the fare and went on board to go with them to Tarshish, away from the presence of the Lord.

Now when you hear the name Jonah, I don't know about you, but I instinctively think of a whale.

And then I begin to think of all those children's songs that I heard when I was younger.

[1 : 13] Songs about this man who ran away from God and was then swallowed by a whale. And I'm sure you probably know a song about Jonah and the whale. Maybe you learned it when you were younger.

Maybe we're all the same. We always think of Jonah and the whale. But sadly that's often all that we remember about the story of Jonah. All we remember is Jonah and the whale.

But you know the interesting thing about the book of Jonah is that when you study the book of Jonah, the whale or the big fish, he actually hardly or she, we don't know which, what it was.

We don't know if it was a male or a female, but we know that this big fish hardly gets a mention. And what you begin to realize is that the story of Jonah is far bigger than a whale.

And you know, that's what I want us to discover as we begin this short study in the book of Jonah. I want us to see that the story of Jonah is actually about Jesus and the message of the gospel.

[2 : 13] The story of Jonah is about Jesus and the gospel. In fact, as we shall see in the coming weeks, Jonah is presented to us as a type of Christ. Because as you know, in the gospels, Jesus compares his experience of death.

He compares his three nights in the tomb. He compares it to Jonah's experience in the belly of the fish three days and three nights. And so in many ways, Jonah shouldn't just be seen as a man who ran away from God and was then swallowed by a big fish.

Jonah should be seen or presented to us as a type of Christ. And the book of Jonah should make us realize the preciousness of the gospel.

And so the book of Jonah, it's far bigger than a fish. And the message of the gospel is far bigger, as we'll see, it's far bigger than Jonah. Because that's what Jonah had to learn.

Jonah had to learn that the message of the gospel was far bigger than him and that God was far bigger than him. And Jonah had to learn this not only as a prophet of the Lord, but he also had to learn it as a disciple of the Lord.

[3 : 20] Because as it is with any servant of the Lord, whether they are a prophet, a priest or a king, they were first and foremost a disciple of the Lord. And it's the same with every minister, every elder, every deacon, every church worker, every church member.

We are first and foremost disciples of the Lord Jesus. But you know, what's sad about the book of Jonah and what comes across time and time again is that Jonah was a disobedient disciple.

Jonah was a disobedient disciple who ran away from the calling that the Lord had placed upon his life. And just from these opening verses, as an introduction to this book, I want us to see three things.

I want us to see Jonah's description, Jonah's direction and Jonah's disobedience. So I want us to just introduce ourselves to Jonah. Jonah's description, Jonah's direction and Jonah's disobedience.

So first of all, Jonah's description. Read at that in verse one. We're told now the word of the Lord came to Jonah, the son of Amitya.

[4 : 33] The name Jonah means dove. The name Jonah means dove, which is a very interesting name, especially when you compare it to the other references to dove or doves in the Bible, because the dove, when you think of dove, the first place I go is Noah's Ark.

The dove was sent out at the Ark as a messenger. It was sent out after the flood. And in its mouth, the dove came back with an olive branch in its mouth.

It came back with the olive branch to Noah, which was a message, a message to Noah of resurrection and renewal. There was a message to Noah after the death and devastation of the flood.

But more than that, when we go to the New Testament and we see the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit descends upon Jesus and described as a dove. And we're told that when the Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus like a dove, there was this message, a message that came from heaven.

This is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased. And so when we read the Bible and when we hear about the dove, we have to remember that the dove was a messenger.

[5 : 44] And that's what Jonah was meant to be. His name was dove. Jonah was meant to be a dove. Jonah was meant to be the Lord's messenger. He was meant to be the Lord's messenger.

But as we know, Jonah was a disobedient dove, but he was still a dove. In fact, Jonah was a disciple of the Lord who had been called to be a prophet of the Lord.

And we know that because when we're introduced to Jonah here in verse one, we're told that the word of the Lord came to Jonah. And that phrase there, the word of the Lord, it was only ever used to describe the Lord's prophets because it was only the Lord's prophets who ever received the word of the Lord.

And when they received the word of the Lord, it's then that they went out and said to the Lord's people, thus saith the Lord. So the prophets were to declare the word of the Lord and they were to proclaim thus saith the Lord.

But as prophets or prophets of the Lord, every prophet's role was twofold. They were to be foretellers and foretellers.

[6 : 54] Prophets were to be foretellers and foretellers. As we know, many of the prophets, they foretold future events. The prophet Isaiah, he is the greatest example.

He presents to us the suffering servant in Isaiah 53. He prophesies over 700 years before the event takes place. He prophesies that Jesus would be wounded for our transgressions.

So prophets were foretellers. They foretold future events. But prophets were also foretellers. They presented, they presented God's word to God's people.

And you know, when the word of the Lord came to that prophet, whatever that word was meant to be, that prophet was to proclaim God's truth.

And he was always to herald God's covenant and he was to challenge anyone within the nation who worshiped false gods or bow down to idols.

[7 : 53] The office of the Lord's prophet, it was to remind the king and to remind the Lord's people that their priority as the Lord's covenant people was that they were to worship the Lord and only serve him.

But you know, if the Lord's people turned away and we see a time and time again in the Old Testament, if the Lord's people turned away and turned to idols, the prophet was raised up. A prophet was called into service and his role was to call the people back to follow the Lord.

The prophets were to remind the people of Israel that their responsibility as a covenant nation was to worship only the Lord and serve him. So prophets were to foretell and foreth tell the word of the Lord to the Lord's people.

But sadly for the most part, as the nation of Israel, the nation of Israel, they turned further and further away from the Lord and we see a time and time again.

And when you read about the prophets or when you read what they wrote or what they prophesied, we see that the prophets spent most of their ministries just preaching a message of judgment.

[9 : 06] You see that here in the book of Jonah, you see it in the book of Amos, you see it in the book of Nahum and Micah, you see this message of judgment. They're always preaching a message of judgment.

And the message is that judgment is coming. You need to repent because judgment is coming. And if the people refuse, if they refuse to repent, the Lord will bring judgment.

And you know, we can actually see that very clearly emphasized and exemplified in the lives of two particular prophets. We have the narrative of Elijah and Elisha.

Most of most of the prophetic books, they're just what they said. But when it comes to Elijah and Elisha, we actually see what they said and what they did. And it's all written for us in a narrative, just like the book of Jonah.

And Elijah and Elisha, they proclaimed the Lord's judgment to the nation of Israel. They proclaimed it to King Ahab again and again. They fearlessly confronted and challenged the monarchs of their day and the idolatrous people within their nation.

[10:13] They called them to repent. But the reason I mentioned Elijah and Elisha, and what's so interesting about Jonah is that Jonah was the prophetic successor to Elijah and Elisha, something I didn't realize at all.

We know that Elisha succeeded Elijah when Elijah was taken up to heaven in a chariot of fire. And the late John L. Mackay in his commentary, he says it was in the year 847 BC.

I don't know where he gets that date from or how he got it, but that's what he says. And John L. he also says that Elisha's prophetic ministry lasted for a further 50 years with Jonah succeeding Elisha as the Lord's spokesman in the year 800 BC.

And I don't know about the timings exactly, but we know that this took place. We know that Jonah succeeded Elisha because of what we're told in 2 Kings 14.

It's the only other reference, apart from the book of Jonah and what Jesus says in the New Testament. 2 Kings 14 is the only other reference where Jonah's mentioned in the Bible.

[11:26] In 2 Kings 13, we're told that Elisha becomes sick and he dies. And then in 2 Kings 14, we're told that Jeroboam, the son of Joash, king of Israel began to reign in Samaria.

He reigned 41 years and he did what was evil in the sight of the Lord. He did not depart from the sins of Jeroboam, the son of Nehelem, which he made Israel to sin. He restored the border of Israel from Lebo Hamath as far as the sea of the Arabia, according to the word of the Lord, the God of Israel, which he spoke by his servant Jonah, the son of Amatai, the prophet who was from Gath, Heifer.

Jonah succeeded Elijah and Elisha. But you know, even though the word of the Lord came to Jonah in the same manner as it came to Elijah and Elisha, the book of Jonah is teaching us that the direction Jonah was sent to preach.

It wasn't the same direction as Elijah and Elisha. Elijah and Elisha were always sent to the Lord's people. They were sent to the covenant people of God.

But Jonah, Jonah was sent to the heathen people of Nineveh, those who were outside the covenant of Israel. And so that's what I want us to see.

[12:43] Secondly, we've considered Jonah's description. He was a prophet of the Lord. But secondly, we see Jonah's direction, Jonah's direction. The word of the Lord came to Jonah, the son of Amatai saying, arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it, for their evil has come up before me.

Like Elijah and Elisha before him, Jonah received the same prophetic calling from the Lord. When you read the stories of Elijah and Elisha, you see that many, many times the Lord uses this word, arise.

And that's what we see here in verse two. It's a word where the Lord was calling and commissioning his prophet into service.

And in the same way, the Lord is calling and commissioning Jonah here. He's calling and commissioning him to carry out his assignment. In fact, when the Lord called and commissioned Jonah, he says, arise and go.

And when the Lord says, arise and go to Jonah, he expects Jonah to act immediately. The Lord wanted Jonah to respond to his urgent request in haste, because it wasn't that the Lord was just calling and then commissioning.

[14:00] And then you could say commanding Jonah to arise and go. But then Jonah was going to sit back and wait for a few years until he's ready to go. That's not what the Lord was doing.

The Lord was calling, commissioning and commanding Jonah to arise and go now. Arise and go now. And you know, when we consider the call, commission and command of the Lord upon our

own lives, whether that call, commission and command is full time Christian ministry, or it's to be an elder or a deacon or a Sunday school teacher or or to do baking in the church or to do cleaning or to do visiting or to do whatever we can for the service of the Lord, whatever the Lord is placing upon our heart.

When we consider the Lord's call, the Lord's commission and the Lord's command upon our lives.

Well, if you're anything like me, you often respond by saying, I'm not ready.

I'm not equipped. I'm not gifted in that area. I feel so inadequate. And we do just as Moses did. We say, please Lord, send someone else.

Send my brother Aaron. Send someone else. Send anyone else to do that task, but not me. But you know, the Lord says to us and he presses it upon his heart by spirit.

[15:23] I want you. You need to go. I'm calling commissioning and commanding you to serve in this office or this capacity or in this way.

And you know, my friend, no matter how weak we may feel or how inadequate and insignificant we may think we are or how anxious we may get at the thought of doing what the Lord is asking us to do when the Lord lays something upon our heart, when the Lord calls commissions and commands us to serve him, we must respond immediately.

We must do what is commanded here, arise and go. We must arise and go to wherever the Lord is sending us and do whatever the Lord is asking us to do.

And you know, speaking from my own experience, when it came to my call commission and command to enter the ministry, I was just like Moses.

I was pleading with the Lord, Lord, send someone else. Send another brother. Because you know, I felt and I still feel it. I feel I'm not equipped for this.

[16:33] I'm out of my depth. I'm completely inadequate for the task. But the one thing I did know is that if I did a Jonah, if I ran away, I would be a disobedient disciple and nobody wants to be a disobedient disciple.

But you know, there's an old saying that I was told when I first applied for the ministry, you know, I cling to it so often. The Lord doesn't call the equipped.

He equips those who may call. The Lord doesn't call the equipped. He equips those who may call.

And you know, that's what we need to remember when the Lord calls us and commissions us and commands us to do something in his service for his glory.

We might feel so weak, so inadequate, so underprepared, but the Lord doesn't call the equipped.

He equips those who may call. Therefore my friend, when the Lord says to us arise and go, we must respond immediately and obediently.

But the thing about Jonah is that he did respond immediately. But he went in the opposite direction.

Because as we said, the direction Jonah was sent, it wasn't towards the Lord's covenant people.

[17:51] The Lord didn't want Jonah to go to his own people. The Lord wanted Jonah to go to the city of Nineveh. Jonah was being called, commissioned and commanded by the Lord to travel 500 miles east.

He was to travel 500 miles east and cross the border outside the boundary of Israel, outside the promised land. And he was to travel all the way to the heathen city of Nineveh.

Now the city of Nineveh, it was located along the east bank of the Tigris River. And it was situated where the modern city of Mosul is today. So the Lord was sending Jonah to Iraq.

That's where he was going. Northern Iraq. And Nineveh at the time, it was this large and wealthy city. It was this, you could say this mighty impenetrable fortress.

It had two defensive walls, not just one, but two that were really thick and they were 30 meters high. And on top of that, on each corner of the fortress, there were these towers that went into the air.

[19:01] They went 60 meters into the sky. These watchtowers. So Nineveh was, it was a key city in the structure of the ever expanding Assyrian army and the empire that was growing all the time.

In fact, the presence and power of Nineveh, because of its presence and power in the ancient world, it later became the capital city of Assyria.

But you know, Nineveh, it wasn't just renowned for its strength. It was also renowned for its sin, which is why the Lord was calling and commissioning and commanding Jonah to go and preach against it.

We're told there in verse two, arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and preach against it, he's saying. Preach against it for their evil, their sin has come up before me.

You know, it's really interesting about Nineveh. Jonah wasn't the only prophet who was sent to preach against the sin of Nineveh. The prophet, Nineham, he was also sent to preach against Nineveh.

[20 : 06] And when you read the book of the prophet, Nineham, Nineham says that Nineveh was a city that was guilty of many sins. He says that the people of Nineveh hated God.

The thought of God repulsed them. They hated God, they hated God's people. And in their hatred of God and in their hatred of other people, they exploited those who were helpless.

They were merciless in war. They never took prisoners. They just slaughtered them all. And they partook in idolatry. They committed prostitution. They performed witchcraft.

And as a powerhouse of a city, they were very, very proud of all their achievements. And of course, as we're told here, their sin angered the Lord.

But what's remarkable is that the Lord called, commissioned and commanded Jonah to preach against it. And he was to preach against it a message of judgment. And the message of judgment was so that if the people of Nineveh repented, they would receive mercy and forgiveness.

[21 : 17] Jonah was being sent to preach judgment in order to provoke repentance so that the people of Nineveh would turn and seek the Lord's mercy and the Lord's forgiveness.

And you know, it ought to remind us of the Lord's character that despite our sin and our disobedience, the Lord is still gracious and he's still merciful. And you know, is that not how David described the Lord in Psalm 103 that we were just singing?

David knew that he was a great sinner. But he realized that the Lord was a great savior, which is why David describes the Lord by saying the Lord, our God is merciful and he is gracious.

He's long suffering. He's slow to wrath and he's plenty is in mercy. And you know, in many ways, that was the message this dove had to take to Nineveh.

He was to take a message of judgment, but judgment in calling for repentance and seeking forgiveness and mercy.

[22 : 23] This dove was to take that message to Nineveh. But you know, it was a message that Jonah also needed to be reminded of himself because as we know, Jonah's direction wasn't in the direction of Nineveh.

Jonah's direction was in the direction of disobedience. Jonah went in the opposite direction. He went in the direction of disobedience. And that's what I want us to see.

Lastly, Jonah's description, Jonah's direction and Jonah's disobedience. The word of the Lord came to Jonah, the son of Amitya saying, arise, go to Nineveh, that great city and call out against it.

For their evil has come up before me. But Jonah rose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. He went down to Job and found a ship going to Tarshish. So he paid the fare and went on board to go with them to Tarshish away from the presence of the Lord.

When the Lord called, commissioned and commanded Jonah, he responded immediately. The Lord said, arise and go and Jonah did, but instead of going east towards Nineveh, Jonah traveled west towards Job.

[23 : 37] Jonah responded immediately, but he responded in disobedience because you could say that Jonah arose not to follow the Lord's call, but to flee from the Lord's call.

Jonah arose to flee to Tarshish. And as you can see, Tarshish has mentioned three times in verse three in order to emphasize that Jonah went to Tarshish, not to Nineveh.

We're told in verse three, Jonah rose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. He went down to Job, I found a ship going to Tarshish. So he paid the fare went on board to go with them to Tarshish away from the presence of the Lord.

In other words, we're being told here, Jonah went in the wrong direction. He went in the way of disobedience. He went to Tarshish. Now it's not clear exactly where Tarshish was, but Tarshish was certainly a place that ships traveled and traded goods because we hear of the ships of Tarshish.

They're mentioned quite a lot in the Psalms. It's mentioned in Psalm 48, but it seems that Tarshish, wherever it was, it was an ideal location for Jonah to travel because it was, you could say it was as far away from Nineveh as geographically possible.

[24 : 57] But you know, when Jonah responded to the Lord's call by disobedience, we can say that he was stepping outside the will of God.

And when you cross that line of stepping outside the will of God, it's always dangerous territory, isn't it? That's how the will of God is described in verse three.

It's described using the phrase, the presence of the Lord. And we're told that twice, that Jonah fled from the presence of the Lord.

And the phrase, the presence of the Lord, it's repeated in order to emphasize that Jonah's disobedience was against the will of God. But you know, we have to ask, why was Jonah being so disobedient?

Why was he doing it? Why was he doing it to himself? Why was, why did he refuse to go to Nineveh? Why didn't he just do it? Why was he willing to step outside the will of God and run away from the Lord and the Lord's call upon his life?

[26 : 01] Why was he doing it? Well, I don't believe that Jonah's disobedience was because he didn't want to be a prophet. He was the Lord's prophet. He knew he was a prophet.

Jonah's disobedience was because he just didn't want to preach to the people of Nineveh. He didn't want to preach to them. And we'll consider this more fully when we come to chapter four.

But the reason Jonah was disobedient to the Lord's call, commission and command upon his life is that he didn't believe that the people of Nineveh deserve the Lord's mercy and the Lord's forgiveness.

He didn't believe that the Lord should be gracious and merciful to the idolatrous heathen people of Nineveh. Jonah didn't think that the people of Nineveh deserve the Lord's grace and the Lord's mercy.

But you know, the thing is, Jonah had obviously forgotten what the Lord said to Moses. I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious and I will show mercy to whom I will show mercy.

[27 : 05] In other words, it's not for anyone to decide whom the Lord cannot or can be gracious and merciful towards. And you know, that's what we always need to remember.

We always need to remember that the the arm of the Lord is not shortened that it cannot save. And his ear is not too heavy that he cannot hear.

There's no one who is outside the Lord's grace and mercy. And we should never put anyone into a box or someone who's outside the will of outside the mercy of God.

And you know, that's what we need to remember because that's what Jonah had to discover. That's what he had to discover. That's what he was going to learn as he stepped outside the will of God in disobedience.

But you know, when Jonah ran away from God, as it's described there in verse three, you would have thought, and this is the last thought I've got here this evening, when Jonah ran away from God, you would have thought that the Lord would have immediately put an obstacle in his path.

[28 : 15] You would have thought that the Lord would have done something to stop him going down to Joppa and getting on a ship heading out to Tarshish. You would have thought that the Lord would have brought in some providence or other to stop Jonah and to convince Jonah that he was going in the wrong direction and that he needed to make an about turn and go back to Nineveh.

Because when you look at this, this passage and the way it's described, it seems that the road to Joppa was easy. There was no obstacles in the way. And the ship for Tarshish, it was just available.

It was waiting at the pier for Jonah. And maybe Jonah thought to himself, well, the Lord has provided me an escape route. I can go this way. It's okay. The Lord will provide somebody else for Nineveh.

Maybe Jonah had even convinced himself, it's okay to run away from the Lord's call upon your life because, well, this is my providence. And you know, looking at his circumstances, Providence had it that Jonah made it to Joppa.

And Providence had it that there was a ship available for Jonah sitting at the pier just at the right time, ready to go. Providence even had it that when Jonah put his hand in his pocket, there was enough money to pay the man the fare that was needed to get onto the boat.

[29 : 32] Providence had it that everything seemed to be going in the other direction. For Jonah, Providence seemed to be saying that it's okay to disobey the Lord.

The Lord will call somebody else and go to Nineveh. And you know, my friend, there's a lesson for us there that we can often misread and misuse the providence of God.

Providence as you know, it's a wonderful thing. It's a beautiful doctrine, one of the most wonderful doctrines. But when Providence is misread and even misused, it's very dangerous. You know, sometimes we can actually disregard God's commands because Providence seems to be saying something different. Sometimes we can take a more relaxed approach to our character or our conduct or our conversation.

Sometimes we can take a more relaxed approach to our call, our commission and even our command because, well, we come to the conclusion this direction must be the right way because this is the Lord's providence.

[30 : 39] But it's only the right way when it's in the will of God and the will of God is the word of God. And you know, I want to be clear.

Providence never contradicts the word of God. When we're reading Providence in our lives, Providence never contradicts the word of God.

Providence only ever compliments the word of God. Providence never contradicts the word of God. Providence only ever compliments the word of God.

And what I mean by that is that if we think, well, this is the providence of the Lord in my life and it's leading me in a direction that is contrary to God's word, then that is not the right way to go.

You always go with the word of God. Providence never contradicts the word of God. Providence only ever compliments the word of God. So regardless of Providence, if we contradict the word of God in our character, conduct or conversation, if we contradict the word of God in our calling, our commissioning and even our command from the Lord, then we're stepping outside the will of God.

[31 : 53] And we're doing exactly what Jonah did for being a disobedient disciple. We're seeking to flee from the presence of the Lord and of course, the Lord doesn't want disobedient disciples, does he?

The Lord wants dedicated disciples. And that's what the book of Jonah is teaching us. The Lord wants dedicated disciples who are committed to his call, his commission and his command.

The Lord wants dedicated disciples. That's what Jonah had to learn as a disciple. And that's what we need to keep learning as disciples of Jesus. And so that's an introduction to Jonah.

We've seen Jonah's description, Jonah's direction and Jonah's disobedience. And God willing next week, we'll see where Jonah's disobedience brought him.

So may the Lord bless these thoughts to us. Let us pray. O Lord our gracious God, we give thanks to thee for thy word.

[32 : 58] That thy word is not a dead book. It is not an ancient artifact, but it is a word that is living and active. It is sharper than any two-edged sword. It is a word that is able to pierce our hearts and conform us and mould us and fashion us into the image of thy dear son.

And Lord, help us we pray never to stand over it, but always to stand under it. To realise that this word is the only rule to direct us on how we make glorify God and enjoy him forever.

Help us Lord to use the word wisely. Help us to walk in thy ways and in accordance with thy will. For that is how thou has taught us to pray. To pray that thy will would be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Lord bless us we pray as a people. We confess that we are often so disobedient, but help us to be dedicated, to be committed. Help us Lord to serve thee wholeheartedly.

Serving the Lord in any way that we can for the glory and for the furtherance of thy kingdom. Lord bless thy children here. Encourage them during this time of vacancy.

[34 : 09] That they would know that the one who is still with them, the one who will never leave them and who will never forsake them. Uphold them and strengthen them. Bless those who are not with us this evening.

Whether they are away on holiday or in town as we heard or those Lord who are confined to their homes. Lord bless us we pray. Pity us. Shine thy face upon us.

That the earth thy way and nations all would know thy saving grace. Do us good then we pray. Take away our iniquity. Receive us graciously for Jesus' sake.

Amen.