

A Disobedient Disciple

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[0 : 00] Well if we could this evening for a short while, if we could turn back to that portion of scripture that we read, the book of the prophet Jonah, the book of Jonah and chapter 1.

Jonah chapter 1 and I just want us to read again in verses 1 and 2. Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the son of Amittai saying, Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city and call out against it, for their evil has come up before me.

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 young.

Songs about this man who ran away from God and was then swallowed by a whale or a big fish. And maybe you're the same. As soon as you hear of Jonah, you think Jonah and a whale.

But you know sadly that's often all that we remember of the story of Jonah. All we remember is Jonah and the whale. But the interesting thing is that when you study the book of Jonah and the whale and the big fish, it actually hardly gets a mention.

[1 : 26] There's only three verses in the whole of the book of Jonah that are attributed to this whale. But what you begin to realise is that the story of Jonah, can I say, is actually far bigger than a whale.

And that's what I want us to discover as we study this book, as we begin a short series on the book of Jonah over the next few weeks. I want us to see that the story of Jonah is actually about Jesus. And it's about the message of 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 own experience of death to Jonah's experience in the belly of the whale.

We read that at the end of chapter one. He was in the belly of the whale three days and three nights. And so in many ways, Jonah shouldn't just be seen as this man who ran away from God and was then swallowed by a big fish.

Jonah should be seen as a type of Christ. And then the book of Jonah as a whole should make us realise the preciousness of the gospel. So Jonah, the book of Jonah, should make us think of Jesus and the gospel.

[2 : 39] And for that reason, the book of Jonah is far bigger than a whale. And the message of the gospel is actually far bigger than Jonah himself. And you know, that's what Jonah had to learn.

He had to learn that not only as a prophet of the Lord, but he also had to learn it as a disciple of the Lord. Because as it is with any servant of the Lord, whether they were a prophet, a priest or a king, they were first and foremost a disciple of the Lord.

Jonah was a disciple. And it's the same with every minister, every elder, every deacon, every church worker, every church member. They're first and foremost.

We are first and foremost disciples of the Lord Jesus. But sadly, what comes across time and time again in this book is that Jonah was a disobedient disciple.

Jonah was a disobedient disciple who ran away from the calling which the Lord had placed upon his life. And just from these opening three verses, I want us to just this evening, just introduce ourselves to Jonah.

[3 : 46] And I want us to introduce ourselves to Jonah just using three simple headings. Jonah's description, Jonah's direction and Jonah's disobedience. So first of all, Jonah's description.

Jonah's description. We'll read again in verse one. Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah, the son of Amittai. The name Jonah means dove, which is actually a very interesting name, especially when you compare it with all the other references in the Bible that mention dove.

Because the dove, well, you immediately think of dove, the dove that Noah sent out of the ark after the flood. That dove was a messenger. Because in its mouth, in the mouth of the dove, the dove

brought back to Noah a branch, an olive branch, which was a message.

A message of resurrection and renewal after the death and devastation of the flood. But more than that, when we go to the New Testament, when the Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus at his baptism, we're told that the Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus like a dove.

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

[5 : 17] The dove was a messenger. And that's what Jonah was to be. Jonah was to be a dove. Jonah was meant to be the Lord's messenger. But Jonah was a disobedient dove.

But he was still a dove. In fact, as we said, Jonah was a disciple of the Lord. A disciple of the Lord who had been called to be a prophet of the Lord. Because when we're introduced to Jonah here, we're told in the opening verse that the word of the Lord came to Jonah.

And that phrase, that phrase was only ever used to describe one of the Lord's prophets. The word of the Lord came. The word of the Lord only ever came to the Lord's prophets because that was their calling.

They were to declare the word of the Lord to the Lord's people. They were to proclaim the word of the Lord to the nation of Israel. And they were to proclaim the word of the Lord with the, you could say, the prefix, thus saith the Lord.

And, you know, as prophets of the Lord, and we've seen this many times before when we've looked at other prophets. As prophets of the Lord, their role was twofold. They were to foretell and they were to forthtell.

[6 : 31] They were to foretell and they were to forthtell. So, when we know that prophets, they foretold, they foretold future events. We see that with the prophet Isaiah.

The greatest example is Isaiah 53. He presents to us the suffering servant. And he prophesies over 700 years before the event takes place.

That Jesus was going to die upon the cross and be wounded for our transgressions. And so, a prophet was a foreteller, but a prophet was also a forthteller. Because a prophet, he was not just to foretell future events.

He was also to forthtell the word of the Lord. And when the word of the Lord came to a prophet, he was to proclaim God's truth. He was to herald God's covenant.

He was to challenge anyone, anyone within the nation who worshipped false gods or bowed down to idols. The office of the Lord's prophet was to remind the king and his people that God was to be their priority.

[7 : 38] The Lord was to be first and foremost in their life. And they were to worship the Lord and only serve him. That was the role of the prophet. But if the Lord's people turned away from the Lord, and if they turned to idols, which they often did, the Lord's prophet was to call the Lord's people back to covenant faithfulness.

The prophets, they were to remind the people of Israel of their responsibility as a covenant people and a covenant nation. That they were to worship only the Lord.

They were to foretell and forthtell. But you know, sadly, for the most part, as a nation, the nation of Israel turned further and further away from the Lord.

And what you find the prophets, what they spent most of their ministries doing, was just preaching a message of judgment. They were always preaching judgment. You see that even in the book of Amos.

All it is is judgment. You see that in other prophetic books. In Micah, it's judgment. And what they were preaching was that if the people refused to repent of their disobedience and idolatry, the Lord would bring judgment upon them.

[8 : 52] And in many ways, the message that they proclaimed was very simple, very straightforward. Judgment is coming. You need to repent. Because judgment is coming. But you know, we can actually see the role of prophets being exemplified very clearly in the lives of two well-known prophets.

Elijah and Elisha. Both Elijah and Elisha, they proclaimed the Lord's judgment. We see that in 1 and 2 Kings. They proclaimed the Lord's judgment to the nation of Israel.

They fearlessly confronted all the kings of their generation. And they confronted even the idolatrous people of their day, calling them to repent.

But you know what's interesting? Is that Jonah. Jonah was their prophetic successor. He was the prophetic successor to Elijah and Elisha.

We know that Elisha succeeded Elijah when Elijah, we know that he was taken up into heaven in a chariot of fire. And John L. Mackay, the late John L. Mackay, he says that it was in the year 847 BC. [10:02] I don't know how he worked it out, but this is what he said. It was in the year 847 BC. And then Elisha's prophetic ministry, he says, lasted for a further 50 years. With Jonah then succeeding Elisha as the Lord's spokesman around the year 800 BC.

And you know, you can actually work out, maybe not the dates, but that he was the successor. You can work it all out because of the reference that's given to Jonah. The only other reference that's given to Jonah, apart from the book and apart from the New Testament, is found in 2 Kings 14. In 2 Kings 13, the previous chapter, you have Elisha. Elisha becomes unwell and he dies. His ministry comes to an end. But then in 2 Kings 14, we're told, In the 15th year of Amazai, the son of Joash, king of Judah, Jeroboam, the son of Joash, king of Israel, he began to reign in Samaria. And 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 Nebat, 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 Amittai, the prophet who was from Gath-Hephar.

Jonah was the successor of Elijah and Elisha. The word of the Lord came to him just like it did with his predecessors. But you know, the book of Jonah teaches us that the direction that Jonah was sent to preach the message of judgment, the direction he was sent wasn't to the Lord's covenant people.

[11:50] Jonah was actually sent to the heathen people of Nineveh. That's what I want us to see secondly. We've considered Jonah's description. He was a prophet of the Lord.

But then secondly, we see Jonah's direction. Jonah's direction. We're told that the word of the Lord came to Jonah, the son of Amittai, saying, Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it, for their evil has come up before me.

And you know, like, just like Elijah and Elisha before him, Jonah received his prophetic calling from the Lord. And we see that because the word arise at the beginning of verse 2, it's a word that the Lord often used with Elijah and with Elisha when he was calling them into office and then commissioning them for service.

And in the same way here, the Lord was calling Jonah. He was calling him. He was commissioning him. And he was even, you could say, commanding him, arise. And he was commanding the Lord, the Lord was commanding Jonah to carry out his assignment.

In fact, when the Lord said to Jonah, arise and go, the Lord expected an immediate response. The Lord wanted Jonah to respond to his urgent request and he was to respond in haste.

[13:11] It wasn't that the Lord was calling, commissioning, and commanding Jonah to arise and go. And then Jonah, well, he had to just wait. Wait until he was ready to go. That's not what the Lord was doing.

The Lord was calling, commissioning, and commanding Jonah to arise and go. Arise and go. And you know, applying it to ourselves, when we consider the call and the commission and even the command of the Lord upon our lives, whether that call, commission, and command is full-time ministry, or to be an elder, or a deacon, or a Sunday school teacher, or even to do baking for a fellowship, or cleaning, or holiday clubs, or providing accommodation, or to help in the church in any way that we can.

When we consider the Lord's call, commission, and command upon our lives, do you know, speaking for myself, we often respond by saying, I'm not ready. I'm not equipped.

I'm not gifted in that area. I feel so inadequate for this. And you know, we often do what Moses did. And we often say, please, Lord, send someone else.

Lord, send my brother Aaron. Send someone else. Ask anyone else to do it but me. But you know, the Lord often says to us, he impresses it upon our heart, and he says, I want you.

[14:37] I'm calling. I'm commissioning. And I'm commanding you to serve in this office and in this capacity. And you know, my friend, no matter how weak we may feel, and how insignificant we may think we are, and how anxious we might get, when the Lord lays something upon our heart, and when the Lord calls, commissions, and commands us to serve him, we must respond immediately.

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, and my commission, and my command to enter the ministry, I was like Moses.

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

I'm inadequate for this. I'm not cut out to be a minister. But you know, I knew that if I did a Jonah and ran away, I would be a disobedient disciple.

And nobody wants that. Nobody wants to be a disobedient disciple. But you know, there's an old saying that I was told when I applied for the ministry. And you know, I cling to it so often.

[15 : 57] The Lord doesn't call the equipped. He just equips those whom he calls. And you know, that's all I cling to. The Lord doesn't call the equipped. He equips those whom he calls.

And that's what we need to remember when the Lord calls us, and commissions us, and commands us to do something in his service. Whatever it may be. And it might not even be seen by others.

But the thing is, the Lord doesn't call the equipped. He equips those whom he calls. And so my friend, when the Lord says to us, arise and go, we're to respond immediately.

And we're to respond obediently. We're not to do what Jonah did. Because Jonah, he did respond immediately. But he went in the opposite direction.

And as we said, the direction Jonah was sent, it wasn't towards the Lord's covenant people. In many ways, that would have been quite easy for Jonah to preach to the Lord's people. He wasn't sent to the covenant-keeping people.

[17 : 05] Jonah was sent to the city of Nineveh. Jonah was being called, commissioned, and commanded to travel 500 miles east, to cross the border out of the promised land, and travel all the way to this heathen city of Nineveh.

Now, Nineveh, it was located along the east bank of the river Tigris. It's situated, or was situated, where the modern city of Mosul is today.

Jonah was being sent to northern Iraq. That's where he was going, leaving Israel and going to Iraq. And Nineveh, at the time, it was this large and wealthy city.

It was this mighty, impenetrable fortress. It had two defensive walls that stood 30 meters high, with watchtowers that were even 60 meters towering into the sky.

Nineveh was this key city in the structure of this ever-expanding Assyrian empire. In fact, because of its presence and power in the ancient world, Nineveh later became the capital city of Assyria.

[18 : 12] But, you know, Nineveh wasn't renowned just for its strength. It was also renowned for its sin. Which is why the Lord was calling, commissioning, and commanding Jonah to go and preach against it.

Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and preach against it, for their evil has come up before me. What's really interesting is, one of the other minor prophets was also sent to preach against this city.

Jonah wasn't the only one who was sent to preach against the sin of Nineveh. The prophet Nahum was also sent to Nineveh. And when you read the book of the prophet Nahum, Nahum says that Nineveh was guilty of many sins.

The people of Nineveh, they hated God. They conspired against God. They did anything to get rid of God. They exploited, and because of that, they even exploited all the helpless people in their city. They showed cruelty even during war. There was no mercy. No such thing as mercy for them. They partook in idolatry. They committed prostitution. They performed witchcraft, and they were, as you could expect, as this mighty fortress.

[19 : 27] They were extremely proud of all their achievements. They were an awful people. And yet, the Lord sent his prophet.

And the Lord sent his prophet, first and foremost, because their sin angered the Lord. But what's remarkable is that the Lord called, commissioned, and commanded Jonah to preach against it this message of judgment.

And he was to preach a message of judgment so that the people would repent. And if the people repented, the Lord would show them mercy and grace.

And you know, it ought to remind us of the Lord's character that despite our sin and disobedience, the Lord is still gracious and merciful. That's what we're singing about in Psalm 103.

That David knew he was a great sinner, and yet he discovered the Lord was a great saviour. That's why he described the Lord in verse 8, the Lord of God is merciful. He is gracious, long-suffering, slow to wrath, and mercy plenteous.

[20 : 30] And in many ways, that was the message this dove had to take to Nineveh. He was going to take a message of judgment, but if you repent of the Lord, he will show you grace and mercy and forgiveness.

And that was a hard message for Jonah to take, which is why Jonah was disobedient. Jonah's direction, it wasn't the way he wanted to go.

And that's why he went in the direction of disobedience. That's what I want us to see lastly. We've seen Jonah's description, Jonah's direction, but then Jonah's disobedience.

Jonah's disobedience. Arise, 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 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.

[21 : 36] When the Lord called, commissioned, and commanded Jonah, he responded immediately. The Lord said, arise and go. Arise and go.

And Jonah did. But instead of going that way, he went the opposite direction. Instead of heading east towards Nineveh, Jonah travelled west towards Joppa.

Jonah responded immediately, but he responded in disobedience. Because Jonah arose, not to follow the Lord's call, but to flee from the Lord's call.

Jonah arose and fled to Tarshish. And that's repeated again and again. The emphasis of where Jonah's going, it's not Nineveh. We're told three times in one verse, it's to Tarshish he went.

He went to Tarshish. He didn't go to Nineveh. Now, it's not clear exactly where Tarshish was. But it's certainly a place where ships travelled and traded their goods.

[22 : 35] Because we see the ships of Tarshish, they're often mentioned in the Psalms, especially Psalm 48. But it seems that Tarshish was an ideal location for Jonah to travel to, because it was as far away from Nineveh as geographically possible.

But you know, when Jonah responded to the Lord's call by disobedience, you see straight away that he's stepping outside of God's will.

He's stepping outside of the will of God. And you know, when you cross that line, you're always entering into dangerous territory, aren't you? That's even how the will of God is described in verse 3.

It's described using the phrase, the presence of the Lord. Jonah rose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. He went down to Joppa, 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.

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

[23 : 50] Why not just go and do as the Lord has asked him? Why did he refuse to go to Nineveh? Why was he willing to step outside the will of God? Why was he so willing to run away from the Lord's call upon his life?

Well, I don't believe that Jonah's disobedience was because he didn't want to be a prophet anymore. He just didn't want to preach to the people of Nineveh. He didn't want to preach a message of forgiveness and mercy to this heathen people.

We'll consider this more fully when we come to chapter 4, 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 should be shown mercy or grace.

He didn't believe that they should be forgiven. He thought they were unforgivable. Jonah didn't think that the people of Nineveh deserved the Lord's mercy or grace or compassion or love.

But you know, 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 upon whom I will show mercy.

[25 : 04] In other words, it's not for anyone to decide whom the Lord can or cannot show grace and mercy towards. That's something we always need to remember.

There's no one outside God's forgiveness. The arm of the Lord is not shortened that it cannot save. His ear is not too heavy that he cannot hear.

He will show mercy to whom he will show mercy. He will be gracious to whom he will be gracious. And that's what Jonah needed to discover as he stepped outside the will of God and disobedience. Jonah, and he does discover it, Jonah will discover that he needs the Lord's grace and mercy just as much as the heathen people of Nineveh.

But you know, this is something I just want to focus upon in conclusion. When Jonah ran away from God, you would have thought that the Lord would have immediately put an obstacle in his path.

[26 : 05] An obstacle to stop him going to Joppa, to stop Jonah getting onto a ship and going to Tarshish. You would have thought that the Lord would have brought in some providence or other to stop this prophet of the Lord and convince him that what he was doing was wrong.

But because the road to Joppa seemed easy as it's written in the passage and the ship for Tarshish was available, maybe Jonah thought to himself, well, the Lord has provided me an escape route. Providence has it that there's a way out. Maybe Jonah had convinced himself that it was okay to run away from the Lord because that was the providence he experienced. You know, looking at his circumstances or even standing in his shoes, providence had it that Jonah made it to Joppa. He made it unscathed. No problem. Providence had it that there was a ship just sitting there waiting at the pier available for Jonah just at the right time. Providence even had it that when he put his hand into his pocket, he had the exact fare to pay the man to get onto the ship and head over to Tarshish.

For Jonah, providence seemed to be saying that it's okay to disobey the Lord. And you know, my friend, there's a lesson for us here that we can often misread and misuse providence.

[27 : 28] Providence is a wonderful thing and it's a beautiful doctrine, but when it's misread and when it's misused, it's very dangerous because sometimes we can actually disregard God's commands because our providence seems to be saying something different.

Sometimes we can even take a relaxed approach to our character or our conduct or our conversation or even our calling, our commission and our command. We can take a relaxed approach because, well, we come to the conclusion, it's okay because this is the Lord's providence for my life.

But you know, I want to be clear. we must only read providence in light of God's word. And providence never contradicts the word of God.

Providence or understanding providence, it will only ever complement the word of God. Providence never contradicts the word of God. Providence only ever complements the word of God.

And what I mean by that is that if there's something in our life and we think, well, the Lord has opened this door. But if that door is against God's word, then we have to just close it and step back from it.

[28 : 45] Providence never contradicts the word of God. Providence only ever complements the word of God. Therefore, regardless of providence, if we contradict the word of God in our character, conduct, conversation, our calling, our commission or our command, we're stepping outside the will of God.

And that's not what we pray, is it? Because we all pray, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. If we step outside the will of God, we're doing exactly what Jonah did.

We're being a disobedient disciple and we're seeking to flee from the presence of the Lord. And of course, the Lord doesn't want disobedient disciples.

disciples. The Lord wants dedicated disciples. And that's what the book of Jonah will teach us. We need to be dedicated disciples.

And that's what Jonah needed to learn as a disciple. And that's what we always need to keep learning as disciples. We're not to be disobedient disciples.

[29 : 50] We're to be dedicated disciples. Dedicated to the Lord in our calling, our commissioning and our commanding from him. We're to be dedicated disciples.

So that's an introduction to Jonah. Jonah's description, Jonah's direction, Jonah's disobedience. And God willing, next week, we'll see where Jonah's disobedience brought in.

May the Lord bless these thoughts to us. Let us pray. O Lord, our gracious God, we give thanks to thee for thy word. That thou hast preserved thy word throughout many generations.

And that it is still a living word. It is not a dead book that we study. It is not a book that is old and outdated. But it is living and active.

It is sharper than any two-edged sword. And we thank thee, Lord, that thy word is able to pierce our heart. It is able to challenge our conscience. It is able to awaken us from our slumber.

[30 : 56] And Lord, we pray that we would not be disobedient disciples, but those who are dedicated to the calling that thou hast given to us, whatever that calling may be, that we would be committed in our commission, that we would continue to serve and follow the command of the Lord.

O Lord, we pray that thou wouldst forgive us if we are disobedient. Help us to walk in thy ways. Help us to seek thy face. Help us, Lord, to look ever to Jesus, knowing that he is the author and he will always remain the finisher of our faith.

Bless us, we pray, guard our hearts and our minds, keep the evil one from us, and go with us, we pray, for we ask it in Jesus' name and for his sake. Amen.

Amen. Well, we're going to bring our time together to a conclusion by singing from Psalm 103, picking up where we left off.

Psalm 103, again on the Scottish Psalter, page 369. We're singing from verse 9 down to the verse marked 13.

[32 : 08] Psalm 103 at verse 9, he will not chide continually, nor keep his anger still, with us he dealt not as we sinned, nor did requite our ill, for as the heaven in its height, the earth surmounted far, so great to those that do him fear, his tender mercies are.

Down to the verse marked 13 of Psalm 103, to God's praise. He will not chide continually, surely, nor keep his tiger still, with us eat red, nor does we sin, nor did we quite doubted.

For as the heaven in its height, the earth surmounted far, so great to those that to him fear his tender mercy is hard.

As far as he stills distant from the west so far hath he from us removed in his love all our iniquity. Such pity our father hath unto his children dear, like pity shows the Lord to such as worship him in fear.

[34 : 39] Just close with the benediction. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and forevermore. Amen.

As evis■ hath amen. . , B the ep spoke to this . , AND an anni', and b m Of a mistake, and you have to see that .

Love the tree .