

Guest Preacher Rev. RJ Campbell

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Preacher: Rev. RJ Campbell

[0 : 00] Seeking the Lord's help and blessing, let us turn to the book of Jonah and chapter 1. Jonah and chapter 1, and we'll read again from the beginning.

Now 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.

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 this is a short book of the Bible. It only has four chapters, 48 verses, and so it can be read very quickly.

And this morning we noted that the book was significant, especially in pointing out to us the breadth of God's grace and mercy.

[1 : 10] That the book is not simply a book about a man that was swallowed by a great fish, but that it is a book that brings before us the character of God.

Now, the breadth of God's grace and mercy was one thing that was so difficult for Jonah to accept. It was so difficult for him to accept the inclusion of the Gentiles into God's redemptive plan. But this book is a book about God's grace to sinners, not only among the Jews, but also among the Gentiles.

It is a book about one of God's servants who received a call from God, but was disobedient to that call, at least at the beginning.

It is a book that strongly warns us all against disobeying God's call to duty. And at the same time, it encourages us to obey our call to duty.

[2 : 22] The source of Jonah's duty was the word of God, and it is the source for me and you tonight. The book begins by saying that the word of the Lord came unto Jonah.

And this morning we noted that it was a great privilege for Jonah, as it is also for me and you to receive the word of God.

It is the most valuable thing that we can hold in our hand and have in our homes. The greatest deficiency that can ever be brought to any person is that he or she does not have the word of God. The word of God always comes with a command. And on this particular occasion, the word of God came to Jonah with the command, Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it, for their evil has come up before me.

The word comes to us all with a particular command. We are all commanded to repent and to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.

[3 : 38] What is important for me and you is that we examine our attitude to the word of God and what it commands us to do.

That is the most important thing for me and you. Examine ourselves. Examine our attitude to the word of God and what it commands us to do.

Our attitude or response to the word of God always carries with it certain consequences. And tonight I want to say a little bit more about the word of God and us.

I know we said a little about it this morning, but I want to continue on that self-same theme. The word of God and our response to it.

When the word of God comes to anyone, it comes in a personal way to them. Here we are told that the word of God came to Jonah.

[4 : 47] The word of the Lord singles him out. And the word of the Lord singles us out. It separates you from all others.

The word of God comes to us in a personal way. And the word of the Lord is coming to you tonight in a personal way. Maybe you are finding out for yourself tonight how the word of the Lord singles you out.

How it sets you apart. In Jonah's case, we are told that he was commanded to go to Nunavie, that pagan city. And certainly this would not be on Jonah's schedule.

This is not according to his plan. Even in the midst of the situation and the environment that he was in in Israel, which wasn't very good.

Nevertheless, it was his comfort zone. But here the Lord was asking him to come out of his comfort zone. You see, the word was bringing Jonah out of his comfort zone and turning his schedule, his plans, upside down.

[6 : 01] Leaving him restless and perhaps lonely as he grappled with the word that had just come to him. The command that had just come to him.

And perhaps the command of the word of the Lord to you to repent and to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ so that you may be saved, that you may share in the salvation that God has worked out for sinners such as me and you.

Maybe tonight it is leaving you restless and maybe even leaving you very lonely. Maybe tonight you are like Jonah.

The word has come to you in a very personal way, bringing you out of your comfort zone, upsetting your plans, your schedule, turning your mind upside down, leaving you in a very restless position.

Up to this point, maybe you were quite comfortable to go along with the believing community and still remain in some ways attached to the unbelieving community.

[7 : 13] Maybe that's your comfort zone, having a foot, as it were, in both camps. Going along with the believing community and still being attached to the unbelieving community.

But now the word has come and commands you to come out from among them, to separate yourself from the unbelieving community, to confess Christ, to make a public profession that you are a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And that makes you uncomfortable and restless because it brings you out from your comfort zone. It goes directly against your own plans and your own schedule.

This is not what you had planned. Perhaps you were quite comfortable with the thought of being a sacred disciple. Or perhaps you had scheduled or planned out when you become a Christian, when you would think seriously of your eternal destiny.

When you would think seriously of the exhortation that is given to you by the preaching of the gospel. That you would come a day when you would think seriously of the command that the word of God brings to you to repent and to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

[8 : 36] But the word of the Lord comes to you tonight. And this is what it says to you. Now is the accepted time. Now is the day of salvation.

It's not tomorrow, next week, next month, next year. It is now is the accepted time. Now is the day of salvation.

Now is the time to repent and to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Oh yes, maybe you had your own schedule or plan of how you were going to serve the Lord.

But the word has come to you in a very personal way. And has totally thrown your schedule, your plan out the window. Because it commands you now to serve him in ways that perhaps you never thought before.

You know, in the gospel of Mark, we are told about the Lord's healing, the man that was demon-possessed. And Mark records for us that the man who had been possessed with demons begged him, that is, begged Jesus, that he might be with him.

[9 : 53] And Jesus did not permit him. But Jesus said to him, Well, this is evidence of a renewed soul.

Wanting to be as close to Jesus as he can possibly be. Is that not the Christian's hope and expectation? That he waits for with great anticipation to be near and to be with Jesus.

However, in our pilgrimage journey towards that goal. We seek to be as close to Jesus as we can. And how do we do that? We do that in prayer.

We do that in fellowship with his people. We do that in his word and in his sacrament. But there is another aspect to following Jesus.

And that is the aspect of witness and serving the Lord. And that can bring us at times out of our own comfort zones. Jesus gave to this man as he gives to me and you.

[11:14] The most difficult ministry to go and witness among a people who had rejected him. Remember, as the gospel records for us, the people had rejected Jesus.

They told Jesus, go away from our coasts. And Jesus did that. But he sent this man back. The man whom he had healed. He sent him back to that very place that had rejected him.

And told him to witness there. Go home to your family. Go home to your neighbors. Go home to your friends. To your workplaces. Go into the world.

Where there is so much unbelief. Where there is so much criticism. And mockery regarding the things of God. When people make fun of the gospel.

And fun of the Bible. And fun of everything that belongs and named upon God. Go there. And witness there for the Lord.

[12:16] That's what he's asking me and you to do. If we are Christians tonight. If we have repented and believed in the Lord Jesus Christ.

That is what he's asking us to do through his word. To go on to be witnesses for him in this world. Perhaps the Lord has greatly blessed you with temporary things of this life.

And now he commands you to serve. To be a witness for him in a world that is hostile to the things of God. But tonight you may be.

The word of God is convicting you. The word of God has come close to you. And is convicting you. And maybe tonight you fear marriage hostility.

Or family hostility. Or hostility at your workplace. And maybe you're making these things to be an excuse from following and serving the Lord.

[13:23] But the word of God brings us out of our comfort zones. The command for Jonah was certainly great. Arise, go to Nineveh.

That great city. And call out against it. Nineveh of all places. He probably thought. And what was Jonah's response?

What was his response? Well we're told. 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 down into it. To go with them to Tarshish. Away from the presence of the Lord. He chose to ignore God's command.

And instead, what did he do? He headed off in the opposite direction. Tarshish was most likely located in what is now the nation of Spain.

[14:29] And Nineveh was east. And Tarshish was west. How many of us went the opposite way when the word of the Lord began to leave us restless and uncomfortable?

When the word of the Lord began to convict us and to stab our conscience? How many of us heard the gospel and rejected the gospel?

But we find these words, perhaps the saddest words, in this whole narrative that we have read today. The four chapters that we have read today.

Perhaps the saddest words or the saddest phrase that we find are these. But Jonah rose to flee. Jonah rose to flee.

God told him to do one thing. But alas, Jonah had other thoughts. Despite the fact that Jonah was given the word of the Lord. Despite the fact that God came to Jonah in such an intimate way.

[15:38] Calling him by name. We are told that Jonah wanted to do other things. Is that a picture of yourself tonight? Maybe the Lord, through his word, has come to you in a very intimate way.

Commanding you to repent and to believe. To come a witness for him in this hostile world. And perhaps tonight you are responding by saying, I can't do it.

Or, it is too big for me. It's too great. That step would be a giant step. And I am not able to do it. I am afraid I cannot take that step. I'm afraid that I cannot go in that direction. Yes, you know the command.

Repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Maybe you are a Christian tonight. And the Lord of the Lord commands you to serve him.

[16:45] And you are saying, well, I can't do it. It's too great. I am afraid. Just like Jonah. Maybe you are running away from the word of the Lord.

There are many reasons and opinions that we could come up with for why Jonah went in the opposite direction. There could have been the thought that the Gentiles were outside the sphere of

salvation.

As we noted already this morning, the Jews looked upon the Gentiles as dogs, unclean. They thought that salvation belonged to them only. That it did not belong to the Gentiles. And maybe that was one of the reasons why Jonah was so reluctant to go to the Gentile world. And especially to Nineveh, the great city of Assyria.

Or maybe that he was afraid of the response that he might receive as he went to that city to preach what the message that God had given him to repent from their sins.

[17 : 59] But we must never put anyone outside the sphere of salvation. The Persian in the gutter. The beggar on the street.

The Persian on the throne. We are all in need of God's salvation. But I think that the root reason was probably unbelief.

Jonah doubted God's word. That there could be salvation for the Gentiles. For if he had been fully persuaded of God's word, he would have obeyed God's word.

Full persuasion always results in obedience. Sadly, it is because perhaps you are not fully persuaded yourself that you continue in the path of rejection and disobedience.

The word of the Lord says, repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Commit yourself to Christ. Follow Christ and be saved. Follow Christ and receive the benefits of his death and resurrection.

[19 : 14] That's what the word of the Lord is saying to you tonight. But you are not fully persuaded of that. You are not fully persuaded. Therefore, you continue in disobedience and unbelief to the word of the Lord.

There is no other explanation for it. You may think that that is very harsh for me to say. But there is no other explanation. If you can come up with one, then tell me about it.

But that's the only explanation there is. You are not fully persuaded of what God is saying in his word. God says that if you leave this world Christless, that if you leave this world without putting your trust in Christ, that you go to hell.

But you are not fully persuaded of that. There are millions in the world in their own nation tonight. They are not fully persuaded of that.

They think that's a myth. They think it's only a story to try and frighten people. But the word of the Lord tells me that if you die Christless, you go to hell.

[20 : 27] Are you fully persuaded of that? If you were, you would come to Christ. If you were, you would be obedient to the word. And you would believe and follow the Lord Jesus Christ.

Your problem is unbelief. Unbelief. Because full persuasion always results in obedience.

For the believer, the word commands us. To witness for Christ in a hostile world. Now I know that we must keep ourselves unspotted from the world and not conform to their ways.

But do I use this as an excuse? To run in the opposite direction for not speaking to anyone about their soul.

There is a world out there of a people who are in a physical and spiritual need. Are we too afraid to interact with them? Are we afraid that if we do interact with them, that we will receive social stigma?

[21 : 36] The alcoholic? The drug addict? The homeless? Or is it just too inconvenient or simply too costly on our time and energy to help them?

And have a word with them about their soul? Or will we be like Jonah and will we just run away?

Jonah was given the opportunity that many of us will never have to preach to thousands and thousands and to win thousands and thousands to the Lord.

But sadly we read that Jonah rose to flee into Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. Jonah deliberately and willfully decided to go in the opposite direction.

The action of Jonah in verse 3 moves so quickly it almost leaves us breathless. Jonah rises up to flee.

Then he is in Joppa. And then he finds a ship. And then he pays the fare to travel on the ship. Then he is down in the ship. Everything happens so quickly.

[22 : 50] Or did it? We may ask how could this happen so quickly? It is quite possible that in Jonah's case, that his spiritual health, as it were, had been decaying for some time prior to this call from God.

And that can happen to me and you as well. Jonah was being conditioned for his great disobedience by inward spiritual decline.

This is why we must keep a constant discipline upon our lives as believers. Are there places where we are slipping? Are there places where we are losing ground?

Are we neglecting God's word? Are we neglecting the Bible? Are we neglecting the reading of God's word? The studying of God's word?

Are we neglecting prayer? Are worldly habits creeping in and bending our wills in the wrong direction?

[24 : 05] If our spiritual life is corroding, then it is much easier for us to go in the path of disobedience. And this is really to us all.

This is a warning to us all. Maybe there was a time when you were quite good at reading your Bible. You were quite good at bending your knee to God in prayer.

You were quite good at attending upon the means of grace. But slowly and sadly, you started neglecting the Bible. You started neglecting the bending of the knee to God.

You started slowly and gradually not attending the means of grace. You know, if our life starts corroding, it is much easier for us to go in the path of disobedience if our spiritual life is corroding.

Twice we are told in verse 3 that Jonah sought to flee from the presence of the Lord. Now, we may be tempted to think that Jonah foolishly believed that by putting physical distance between himself and Israel, that he was escaping God's actual presence.

[25 : 29] In one sense, it is impossible to get away from the presence of God. God is omnipresent. He's everywhere. And Jonah was a prophet of God.

It is hard to believe that he knew so little about God to think that he was limited by space. After all, he would have known the psalm that we have sung this evening, Psalm 139.

But the expression from the presence of the Lord in verse 3 is not a reference to the omnipresent attribute of God. Other passages in the Bible show how the expression can refer to a number of other things other than God's omnipresent.

For instance, this expression, this expression, away from the presence of the Lord, is said of Cain. In Genesis chapter 4, we read there, then Cain went away from the presence of the Lord and settled in the land of Nod, east of Eden.

It is said that it signifies someone who has refused the service that God has given. In this case, I think that it is very probable that Adam and his family worshipped at the place there, outside the garden where the cherubim was, that kept away into the garden, was placed.

[26 : 48] I am of the opinion that there they worshipped God at the cherubim. But Cain decided to leave that place, to go out into the land of Nod, and to turn his back upon the place where they worshipped God and went into the land of Nod.

He refused to serve the Lord. So the Bible records of him that he went out from the presence of the Lord. In Jeremiah chapter 23, we read of God saying to disobedient Israel, I will surely lift you up and cast you away from my presence, you and the city that I gave to you and your fathers.

Obviously, this does not mean that God no longer will be omnipresent. So what does it mean? Well, it means that Israel was going to be separated from some of its spiritual privileges.

For example, the temple was soon to be destroyed. These are examples of being taken away from the presence of the Lord. From the Scriptures, we learn that the expression presence of the Lord does not always, therefore, refer to the omnipresent of God, that it can refer to other things, such as the place of worship and of serving God.

So when we read that Jonah rose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord, it means that he was moving away, moving away from the place of serving God.

[28 : 21] This is always the customary, consistent practice of sin and disobedience. When a person disobeys, that person will sooner or later separate and absent themselves from the things that represent the presence of God.

And that's what Jonah was trying to do. He was trying to separate and absent himself from that which represented the presence of God. How does that come in my life, in your life, in the life of our communities?

Well, the people will absent themselves from the Word of God, whether read or preached, and from the place of prayer. Disobedience will produce a decline in our interest in reading and studying the Word of God.

Jonah, fleeing to Tarshish, was seeking to separate himself from the Word that the Lord had given to him. Arise, go to Nunavie, and preach.

And maybe tonight, that is something that you are guilty of yourself, separating yourself from serving Lord, separating yourself from what the Word of the Lord is commanding you to do.
[29 : 40] 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 down into it to go with him to Tarshish, away from the presence of the Lord.

The frightening thing is that Jonah felt that he had confirmation in his disobedience. Jonah was determined to go in the opposite direction and to go to Tarshish. He found a ship going to Tarshish. It sounds like this plan of his is successful. There is a ship. He probably convinced himself that he was right in what he was doing. Providence seems to be with him. It is like the woman in the Garden of Eden after she succumbed to doubt the Word of God. She looked at the fruit and she saw that it was good for food. I suspect that by the time she took of the fruit, she was convinced that she was doing the right thing. When you are living in disobedience to God's commandment, you will find at times as if providence is there to confirm you in that disobedience.

[30 : 53] You can find confirmation for the things you want to believe and convince yourself that you are doing the right thing. He may well have reasoned that if his course was wrong, then God would have placed an obstacle in his path.

But the case was the opposite for Jonah. In Joppa, there was a ship that was going to Tarshish. You see, you can be misguided by circumstances.

And here we come to that little paperback of great theology called the Catechism. And the Catechism asks, what role have God given to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy him? And the answer it gives is, the word of God, which is contained in the scriptures of the Old and New Testament, is the only role to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy him. Then it asks, what do the scriptures principally teach? And the answer is, the scriptures principally teach what man is to believe concerning God and what duty God requires of man.

[32 : 07] It's not circumstances that is to guide us, but the word of the Lord. How easily the path of disobedience appeared, at least at first.

Jonah went down to Joppa, and what did he find on his arrival at Joppa? A ship going to Tarzan. There was room for him on the ship, and he was able to pay the fare. Oh, it is indeed a reminder to us, is it not, that circumstances alone do not prove God's blessing.

The confirmation we always need is the word of God. It is interesting that what we have recorded for us is that each step that Jonah took was at going down.

He went down to Joppa. He went down into it, that is, he went down to the ship. And Jonah was going down into the sides of the ship, and he lay, and he was fast asleep.

For you cast me into the deep, into the heart of the seas, and the flood surrounded me. All your waves and your billows passed over me. It was always in a downward direction he was going.

[33 : 22] And the way of rebellion is always a way that takes you down, further away from God. It seems that just about each step that Jonah took when he began his disobedience course was a step down in the physical sense.

Now, it's not necessarily wrong to go down physically, but very often when the Bible focuses attention on a physical descent or a physical going down, it carries with it a spiritual lesson. And that is true here. Not only was Jonah going down in a physical sense, but he was also going down in a spiritual sense. Jonah's physical descent spoke of a spiritual descent.

Jonah, as we see here, went from being God's spokesperson to being rebuked by a heathen, heathen shipmaster. Jonah went down continually.

It's a reminder to us that once you start sinning, it is much easier to sin yet more and more. Once Jonah got on the sinful slide downward, he kept going down, down, down.

[34 : 35] This is a strong warning to us all. For once you allow yourself to be captivated by one sin, you will always crave for more and more.

Ask the alcoholic about his first drink. Ask the person whose life is ruined by drugs about the first time he tried drugs. And the evidence is that it led to more and more until their lives were ruined. the alcoholic only expected to take the first drink. The drug addict only believed to take the drug for once. But what happens? The craving becomes and they go more and more.

You see, it is also the same. You fall into the habit. You fall into the habit. You see, once you begin skipping church and committing any sin, the second time it's easier.

And what you find is that church attendance go and what you find is that you become enslaved to whatever particular sin that has captivated your heart.

[35 : 54] We must not stay negative though. there is a positive. The good news of the gospel of the grace and the mercy of God that can lead a person from being enslaved to any particular sin and from the path of obedience and disobedience and that is what we have here.

We see by the end of their book how the grace and mercy of God shone brightly in his life. how Lord was disobedient how the second chapter and the third chapter and the final chapter brings before us how on his second call how Jonah did not reject but obeyed and brought a message to the Ninevites and the Ninevites repented and was saved.

The question facing each one of us is whether we are willing to obey God's will God's intervening grace he has made known to us our need to repent our need to return to him and the thing is are you willing to return to the unbeliever tonight God's command comes to you it has been made known to you repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved are you willing to come to God confessing your sin and seeking the power for new obedience if you're a backslider tonight if you have slipped away well the word comes to you tonight and it says repent and return to me repent and return to me are you willing to return are you willing to come to God confess your sin and seek the power for new obedience and for every Christian here tonight we have to examine our response to the word of God he asks us to serve him by witnessing in our homes in our families in our workplace in our communities are we willing to do that are we willing to serve the Lord in that manner or are we like Jonah seeking to flee from the presence of the Lord may the Lord bless our thoughts let us pray eternal and ever blessed Lord we acknowledge O Lord that we fail thee in so many ways that at times we find ourselves like Jonah but we bless thy name that thou art the

[38 : 58] God of all mercy that thou art the God of all grace that thou doth command us to repent and that thou art willing to bring us back into the path of obedience we pray O Lord that thou would bless thy word to us that thou would bless us during the coming days and all that we ask for the forgiveness of our many sins in Jesus name and for his sake amen we shall conclude at this time by singing to the Lord's praise from Psalm 46 on page 271 Psalm 46 on page 271 God is our refuge and our strength in straits our present aid therefore although the earth remove we will not be afraid the hills amidst the seas because the waters shore remain and trouble be ye though the hills by swelling seas to shake our river is whose streams do glad the city of our

God the holy place wherein the Lord most high hath his abode God in the midst of her dwell nothing shall her remove the Lord to her and help her will and that right early prove we shall sing these verses to the Lord's praise Psalm 46 verse 1 to 5 God is our refuge and our strength in straits our present aid God is the refuge under strength in straits our present aid therefore although the earth re-good we will not be afraid though hills amidst the seas rain please because o'er the waters roaring life and internal

The valley, here though the hills Thy swelling seas to cheer A river rich to streams to cloud The city of our God The holy grace In the Lord, O Staiacristagot God in the midst of our death

Nothing shall hurry blue The Lord who are on earth The roof and the dry darling blue The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ And the love of God And the fellowship of the Holy Spirit Be with you all, now and forevermore.

Amen.