

5/5 Disobedience

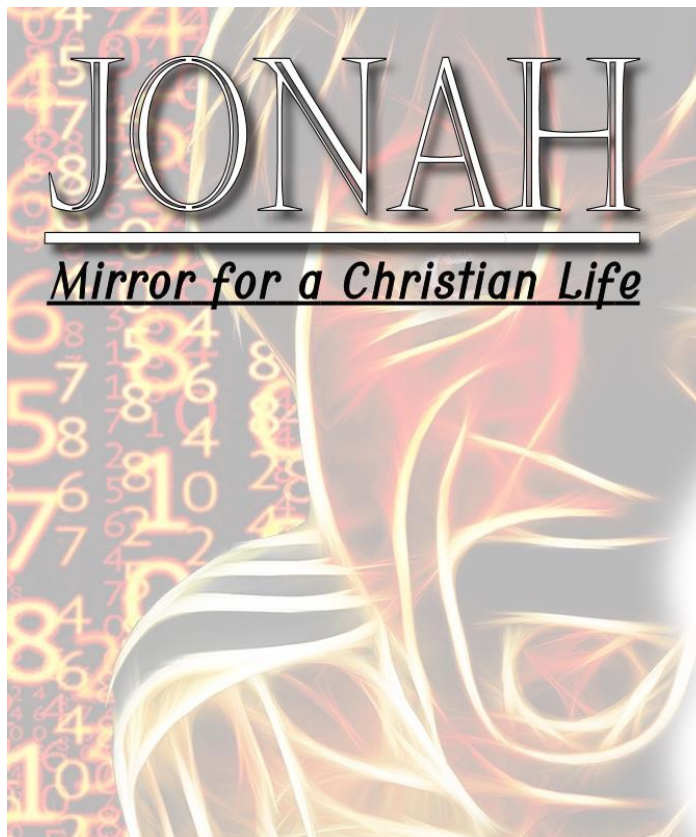
Jonah 1:1-2

- 1 The word of the Lord came to Jonah son of Amittai:**
- 2 “Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me.”**
- 3 But Jonah ran away from the Lord and headed for Tarshish.**

Special Music “In the Belly of the Whale”

Newsboys

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BQOoovMOJUM>



Disobedience

Jonah 1:1-2

- 1 The word of the Lord came to Jonah son of Amittai:*
- 2 “Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me.”*

DISOBEDIENCE

Myron McIntosh sat on the bench outside Wild Bill's QuickStop that served as a bus stop in Parable with his head in hands. The metal bench sat near the highway and had a sheet metal cover donated by Harris Hardware with the store's logo prominently displayed on the back. On normal days it served to keep the sun off the head and necks of those waiting, but today it was keeping the drizzle off. What a gloomy day as raindrops pinged off the metal roof.

Myron reached into his pocket and scanned over the bus ticket that Trent Willoughby had just sold him. When he reached Ruskville he would catch another bus from there to San Antonio, Austin, Fort Worth, or maybe even Houston. He hadn't decided yet. He just needed to leave.

It was 10:00 in the morning and the bus was due at 10:15, assuming it wasn't late, which it often was. This section of highway that ran on the north side of Parable wasn't as well kept as some of the other roads and when it was drizzling, like today, the bus drivers drove with a little more caution knowing it was better to be a few minutes late than wind up in a ditch and have to wait to be pulled out.

Myron stuffed the ticket back into his jacket to keep it from getting wet. He didn't have a lot of money, but he had been saving up for a while. How far could he go on \$300? He was going to have to be very careful with his money and would need to find a job quickly. He really hadn't thought this all through all the way. It would probably be cheapest to make his way to San Antonio, maybe find a

shelter there until he could get on his feet. The fact that he was only seventeen wasn't going to make it any easier. Maybe he should enlist. He had been in ROTC this last year. The Army was always looking for new meat. They had been trying to recruit him.

But right this minute, he just needed to be gone before 11 o'clock this morning. That was when he was supposed to be in court, and he didn't want to be around when Sheriff Thom came looking for him when he didn't show up as promised. Judge Darling was not going to be pleased. After all, she had released Myron into his mother's custody on the promise that she would have him in court on time. Myron had flat-out lied to his mother, promising her that she didn't need to close the diner because he would make sure to be at the courthouse at the specified time.

Myron had hatched his plan the night before as he lay in bed. The guilt had been overwhelming. He had never meant to cause such a problem. Meeting up with the guys at the creek last Friday night was not that unusual for him, but Jeff had managed to wrangle some beer and things had gotten a little out of hand. Myron, Jeff, Bruce, and Jason were the best of friends, even if their ages varied. With the size of the population of Parable, that didn't seem to matter much. They were teenage boys and always into some kind of mischief, but never anything too serious.

That was until last Friday. Myron knew he was in no condition to drive home after enjoying the beer with his friends, but hey, it was only a couple of miles. What could go wrong? It was drizzling then, too, and Max Sanders'

labrador had run in front of the car and Myron didn't see her until the last minute. He was going too fast and his reflexes were too slow. He managed to jerk the wheel in an attempt to avoid hitting the dog. But hit him he did, causing him to lose control of the vehicle and crash into Mr. Sander's new pickup truck. The noise of the collision had been horrific, and Myron had just sat there in the car as curious neighbors gathered around, urging him to get out of the vehicle. After a few attempts and help from the onlookers, he was able to free himself from the car and look at the damage. His mother's only car pretty banged up and not going anywhere. Mr. Sander's truck was going to need a lot of work. Only the dog had been hurt, but Myron would never forget the picture fixed in his mind of 70-year-old Mr. Sanders, falling to the wet pavement, taking his bleeding dog's head into his lap, and sobbing. Mrs. Sanders had passed on last July, and everyone knew that it was Mr. Sanders's yellow lab, Maggie, who was the comfort that he had clung to in his grief. The rain came down on everyone at the scene, but no one complained about being wet. For something so tragic, the air was thick and extremely quiet, a stark contrast to the metal-on-metal screech and the yelps of the injured dog.

Sheriff Thom and Deputy Wagner arrived, sirens screaming and lights flashing, breaking up the quiet. They quickly took charge of the scene, asking questions and taking statements from the people there. Deputy Wagner had handcuffed Myron and put him in the back of her cruiser. It was not a common thing in Parable to see someone in handcuffs, but protocol demanded it, since it was obvious that Myron was inebriated. The smell of beer on his clothes caused

Myron's stomach to churn and he was afraid he was going to be sick in the back of the police car.

Back at the station, Myron felt humiliated as they took a blood sample for an alcohol testing. Deputy Forrester processed his fingerprints, took his picture, put the cuffs back on him, and placed him in a holding cell. Myron felt like he was helpless and trying to find a way through the fog of the events. His mother had shown up and Myron would never be able to forget the look on her face and the tears in her eyes when she saw him in handcuffs behind the bars of the holding cell.

"What have you done, Myron? What have you done? Are you hurt? Do I need to take you to the hospital?" she cried. She ran and threw her arms around him through the cell bars, drawing him as close as she could. Myron wished he could hug her back, but he was still wearing his cuffs.

Through her sobs, she angrily asked the sheriff, "Are those handcuffs really necessary, Thom? He's obviously not going anywhere!"

The sheriff nodded to his deputies that it was okay to take the cuffs off. He pulled Daisy away from her son and led her to a chair by his desk. He then began to fill her in on all that had happened. He assured her that Myron hadn't been injured, but that she would need to come back in on Saturday morning for her son's arraignment. He would need an attorney. She was still shaking when Deputy Wagner took her home.

Myron just wanted to find a hole to crawl into. The adrenaline had cleared most of the fog from his brain, but he still couldn't wrap his mind around what had happened. He was unable to sleep that night on the cot in his cell as he kept reviewing the night's events over and over in his mind.

Things had gone downhill from there. Although Judge Darling had released him into the custody of his mother, his blood test had come back with his alcohol level well over the legal limit. He was facing a DUI and his new attorney, Alice Charm, said she would do her best to help him through this time. Neither vehicle was drivable, which was going to be a great hardship for both Daisy and Mr. Sanders until the insurance was worked out. On top of that, Mr. Sanders was bringing a civil suit against both Myron and his mother for the loss of Maggie, his Labrador. Myron couldn't see how things could get much worse.

So, here he sat, contemplating the events and how badly he had messed up. It wasn't that he had just messed up his own life, but there was all the pain that he had caused for both his mother and Mr. Sanders. They would all be better off if he just disappeared out of their lives.

The bus was late. Very late. It was 11:15. It didn't really surprise Myron when Sheriff Thom rolled up in his truck. "Come on, Myron, get in the truck. Don't make this any more difficult than it needs to be. We both know this is not the smartest thing to do when you are already in so much trouble."

"No, sir, it isn't," Myron replied sheepishly as he climbed into the truck. It was about time he started acting like a man and began to meet his problems

head-on. The ride back to the courthouse was very quiet, but Myron was so very grateful that the Sheriff had decided that the handcuffs weren't necessary for this ride.

The story of Jonah. Let's deal with the elephant in the room. Is the book of Jonah a historical document or a work of fiction? There are some places in this world that I would be taken to task for even suggesting that this is a valid question. If one is a Biblical literalist then, of course, it is a historical resource. But if we allow ourselves the latitude to believe that some of the authors in the Bible are given to relating parables (stories), to teach us lessons, then maybe the context is somewhat mixed. I have found over the years that the actual message of a book like Jonah can get totally lost while people argue over its provenance and place the what and who over the why. I have no issue in believing the story of Jonah is a gift to us from God to encourage wisdom for our lives.

The narrative of Jonah occurs during the reign of King Jeroboam II of Israel, somewhere near the end of the 8th century BCE, around the same time as the prophet Amos. The world was a dark place at the time. Shalmaneser III, son of Ashurnasirpal II, was the king of Assyria. The treatment of the captives of the Assyrians at the time was beyond brutal. By western standards, they were closer to being what we think of as barbarians with little thought given to the value of human life. Ninevah, at the time, was one of the largest cities in the world, and a great trading hub and financial center for the Assyrian Nation. It is believed that the circumference of the city was over 90 kilometers, about 56 miles. This city was huge. It would take someone three days to walk around it, if one were so inclined and that was their only goal.

Assyria was at constant war with their neighboring nations and quite efficient at absorbing every culture it came in contact with, showing no mercy for

any nation in the path of its armies. The Assyrians had even conquered the Babylonians. But in 616 BCE, the Babylonians led a revolt against the Assyrians that was focused on the city of Ninevah. It took three months of siege before the city finally fell and another 10 years to expel the Assyrians from Mesopotamia and the Middle East.

Why does any of this matter, preacher? How does the story of Jonah fit into all this violent history? It is important to relate this information to you because there are many references in the book of Jonah that speak of this time in history quite factually. Context is valuable when studying scripture. If Jonah is just a story, it is obvious that the author has done his homework. Many Jewish and Christian historians attribute the authorship of the book to... well Jonah himself. But there is no indication in the text that actually states that Jonah wrote the book. So, we find ourselves back to the question, is Jonah a well-researched piece of fiction or is it a factual written account, at least written in part by Jonah himself? Does it matter? There are more historians that believe that the story is a work of fiction. But I will tell you this, just because most people believe or disbelieve something, doesn't affect the truth, and our God is capable of anything. He is the Creator of all that is, after all.

What I do think is important, is that we understand the depth of the dilemma facing Jonah. This Israelite is asked by God to go to Ninevah, a task that to him meant certain death. Not only was he to go to Ninevah, but he was to bring words from the God of Israel that Ninevah would be destroyed if the people of Ninevah did not change their ways. With the strength and size of the Assyrian

army, most of the citizens of their large city would probably have laughed at the thought that the God of little old Israel could be any match against their empire. As a matter of practice, people do not generally enjoy having strangers, especially those that they think are inferior, show up and tell them how to run their lives and who threaten them with destruction. Jonah probably could see no way that this trip was going to end well for him. What we are looking at here is akin to an unarmed and unaccompanied Jewish Rabi going into the heart of Gaza to preach a message of coming destruction to the members of Hamas. Or an evangelist from the U.S. going by themselves to bring a Christian message to al-Qaeda. Not impossible, but the odds of survival, from a human standpoint, are not necessarily in the minister's favor. We can be quite sure that Jonah had visions of being impaled in a market square if he did what God was asking him to do.

And his thoughts got the best of him. Believing he could worm his way out of doing what God was asking, he buys passage on a ship set for Tarshish, which is in the opposite direction of Ninevah. Now let's be honest with ourselves, if we were faced with the same dilemma, most of us would make the same choice that Jonah did. God never promises us that we won't be walking into danger if we follow his will. As a matter of fact, Jesus says in John 15:18, **"If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first."** God did not tell Jonah that everything was going to be hunky dory, a walk in the park, or a pleasant experience when God told him to go to Ninevah. He just said, "Go!" He does that a lot in the Bible. Go from the Garden. Go to Egypt. Go to the desert. Go to the Promised Land.

**Go to the King. Go to the Samaritans. Go to the Israelites. Go to the Gentiles.
Go to the ends of the earth. Just Go!**

There are basically two kinds of disobedience when it comes to being a follower of Christ.

- 1. The first one is when we know what God wants us to do and we refuse to do it. Just like in the story of Jonah. God specifically told him what he needed to do and where he needed to do it. And Jonah responded, just like an obstinate child, “I’m not going to do. Not way. I’ll just sneak out the back way here so that you won’t even know that I’m gone. I’m going to make sure you can’t find me. Trust me, God. I am not the right person for this job.”**
- 2. The second type of disobedience is a little less obvious. God has given us a set of standards to live by. I’m not going to call them rules because rules imply set boundaries. The problem with rules is that too often we insist that they are black and white. “You can’t do this. You can’t do that. You can’t act that way. You can eat this or drink that.” Jesus knew this was a problem because there is a need for some gray areas here. He says, **“Which of you, having a donkey or an ox that has fallen into a pit, would not immediately pull him out on Sabbath day?”** It’s not that the rules regarding the Sabbath aren’t good guidelines, but there are times when practicality sets in. It was Thomas Inman in the 19th century that first said, “First, do no harm” even though it is often attributed to the Hippocratic Oath. Christ says this in Mark 12:30-31, **"And you must****

love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength. The second is equally important: Love your neighbor as yourself. No other commandment is greater than these." It doesn't mean the other commandments do not exist or need to be followed, but that each circumstance should be weighed according to the situation. If following a law is in opposition to either loving God or loving your neighbor, then we should always step into love, rather view the law as a steadfast set of rules. And yes, doing so will probably get you in trouble at times, (I know it does me), when you have to make decisions like this. And yes, there are times when doing what God asks us to do will be in direct opposition to man's laws and there will probably be consequences. God never promises there won't be.

But I wouldn't want us to expect that a giant fish will show up to swallow us whole if we say "No" to God. But don't think that God doesn't see us trying to sneak off so that we can avoid his will for our lives either. God may allow circumstances to come into our lives that will encourage us to turn back in the right direction, and do what he expects. We may discover that what we thought we were getting away with, just led us back to where we were supposed to be. It's kind of like Sheriff Thom showing up at that bus stop to take Myron back to the courthouse.

Sometimes, there are things that God wants from us that only we can do. No one else is right for the task, whether we like to be singled out or not. When Jonah took the boat headed for Tarshish, no one else on board was privy to what

Jonah was trying to do. This was purely a Jonah response. In today's world, no one asks what we are running away from if they find us buying a ticket on a boat, plane, bus, or train. Our money is as good as everyone else's and as far as we are concerned, why we want that ticket is nobody's business. Trent never asked Myron why he needed a bus ticket to Ruskville. After all, people took the bus to Ruskville all the time. People booked passage to Tarshish all the time.

There are times when we like living in the shadows. It's easier for us to keep secrets there, no light to shine on our indiscretions. And being in a season of disobedience is one of those times. The thing about having a relationship with Jesus though, is that he is light. And wherever he goes, he brings the light with him. We are his sheep, and he will come to find us and bring us back to the flock. And when he does, it will be in the full light of his grace and mercy. As a child of the Most-High, we not only can't get lost, but we also can't hide intentionally either. He will find us wherever we are.

I want us all to think about that this week as we reflect on these words today. As we take time in prayer and reading our Bibles, is there something that we are trying to hide from God? Is there some active form of disobedience that we are trying to cover up? Is there something we think he doesn't know about. I assure you, he is well aware of it, no matter how hard we try to hide it from him. Buying a ticket out of town will not keep him from finding us. Getting on a boat going in the opposite direction will not solve our problems. It is always to our benefit to confess our disobedience before God, bring our sin into the light, and

let Christ wash us, forgive us, clean us up, and bring us back to where he needs to be.

God bless you all,

AMEN

Copyright © 2024 Rev. Walt Wellborn

Scripture references provided under copyright by:

THE HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION©, NIV© Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc. © Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.