

Theme

- Jonah’s desperate disobedience brings upon him and the sailors serious consequences, it is a poor witness to the pagans on board the ship and it results in justified discipline from God.

A. Disobedience Always Has Consequences

- Have you ever known that you ought to obey God and you willfully disobeyed him? I suspect that all of us at one point or another have disobeyed God. The Lord commands us to obey him as an indication that we have put faith in him and that we love him (Jn 14:15, 21; 15:10; 1 Jn 5:3):
 - **John 14:15, 21** ¹⁵ *"If you love me, you will keep my commandments. ²¹ Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and reveal myself to him."*
 - **John 15:10** ¹⁰ *If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love.*
 - **1 John 5:3** ³ *For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome.*
- Jonah intentionally disobeyed the Lord and fled from Joppa to Tarshish, either because he didn’t like the message God gave him, or he didn’t want to see the inhabitants of Nineveh come to know Yahweh, “Israel’s” God. How often do we disobey God and bring on hard consequences, even those of us with many years

in the faith? In Jonah's case, his defiance brought trouble for the ship, the captain, the sailors and ultimately himself. Our God is righteous, he does not tolerate disobedience and he brings consequences to bear on those who turn away from him.

- Jonah's flight was foolish for any number of reasons. First, it directly contradicted the command that God gave to him in 1:2. Second, running from the omnipotent Lord directly contradicted God's revealed word in Scripture. Hundreds of years before Jonah's ill-advised trip to Tarshish, David wrote in the Psalms:

- ***Psalm 139:7-12*** ⁷ *Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence?* ⁸ *If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there!* ⁹ *If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,* ¹⁰ *even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me.* ¹¹ *If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light about me be night,"* ¹² *even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is bright as the day, for darkness is as light with you.*

- Third, Jonah's rebellion endangered the lives of the seamen and the captain, who had no idea that on board was a disobedient Hebrew who was running away from God. How often are we so foolish? How frequently do we willfully turn away from what God has called us to do and do what we want to do? How many times do we not even consider the consequences of our disobedience, as if God doesn't know what we're doing? We think of the "shall nots" of the Ten Commandments, but there are affirmative commandments such as the Fourth Commandment

(keeping the Lord's Day) and the Fifth Commandment (honoring parents). When we forsake the gathering, i.e., attending worship regularly, we are disobeying the Fourth Commandment (ex. of Nate Wakeman). Younger folks, when you don't do what your parents have taught you to do, you are disobeying the Fifth Commandment because God has put your parents in authority over you. When we do not go and make disciples of the nations, we are disobeying the Lord Jesus who gave us the Great Commission in Matthew 28.

- Jonah's sinful and desperate disobedience has direct consequences which unfold in the remainder of the first chapter. Our sin finds us out, doesn't it? Sometimes the consequences are clearly seen, other times they are not so evident (ex. of ring stolen from Tom Benjamin's mother). But make no mistake, God sees everything and will demand an account for all disobedience. The ultimate consequence of unrepentant disobedience is death and eternal separation from God (Eph 2:2, 5:6; Tit 3:3-7; 1 Pe 2:8). The Scriptures are quite clear that only those who trust in the Lord Jesus will be welcomed into his kingdom. That trust means not only believing that Jesus died for our sins, but it also means obeying to the best of our ability out of love for our Savior, who has given us the Holy Spirit as our guide.

A. Disobedience is a Poor Witness

- Jonah's disobedience was a poor testimony of faith. As the frightened sailors are crying out to their pagan gods, it's not until the captain wakes Jonah up that the prophet responds to the crisis, the tremendous storm which God has brought on

the ship (v 6). Jonah admits his guilt and in one of the most ironic scenes in the Bible, says in v 9 that he's a God-fearing Hebrew, although he's acting more like a pagan. The sailors and captain are more righteous than the prophet! Our witness before others is of very great importance; tarnishing it can diminish our effectiveness for Christ. I cannot count the stories over the years of non-believers who have had, lamentably, a very bad experience with professing Christians. The late Dr. James Boice in his commentary on Jonah says this:

- *Someone has said that non-Christians never look better than when they are compared with some Christians, and that is certainly true if the Christians are disobedient ones. It is true in this story. Jonah, in his disobedience, is quite willing that all the inhabitants of Nineveh perish; for his message is one of impending judgment, and his fear is that it might be suspended if he should preach to them and they should repent. But the sailors, themselves pagans like the people of Nineveh, are unwilling that Jonah (just one man) should perish even though he has brought them into a position of great danger. (The Minor Prophets, An Expository Commentary, p. 225)*

- These polytheistic sailors had been around the Mediterranean and undoubtedly had heard of Yahweh, the powerful God of the Israelites. What must have been their impression of this man who claimed to follow Yahweh yet didn't even come up from the hold to see what all the trouble was about? The Law called for love for the stranger or foreigner:

- **Leviticus 19:34** ³⁴ *You shall treat the stranger who sojourns with you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.*
- Jonah's lack of concern for the sailors was a clear violation of Leviticus 19. Our conduct as Christians, particularly as disobedient Christians (as Dr. Boice notes) reflects poorly on the Lord Jesus whom we profess to serve and obey. Jonah's act of disobedience was fleeing from the specific job that God had given him to do, preach to the hated Ninevites. Our acts of disobedience may not seem quite so obvious, but they are every bit as rebellious. There are sins of omission, which are equally serious in God's eyes, and sins of commission, such as Jonah's. Our witness before others is impoverished and can be compromised when we are disobedient. Disobedience is a poor witness because it shows that we don't consider our faith to be something real, true and demanding of our allegiance.

A. Disobedience Leads to God's Discipline

- Jonah finally admits that he's the problem and despite the sailors' protestations to the contrary, he tells them that they should throw him into the sea. After futilely trying to row back to shore, the sailors and the captain comply with Jonah's request and throw him into the water. Interestingly, it's the pagan sailors and captain who act more like Hebrews as they ask the Lord's forgiveness for their actions and offer a sacrifice to Jonah's God in fearful and grateful appreciation for his calming of the sea. Jonah, meanwhile, suffers the consequences of his disobedience by spending three days and nights inside the great fish.

- For the believer, disobedience will bring on God's discipline (cf the reading from Heb 12:6-10). In his mercy God disciplines us to correct us and put us on the right path. He doesn't leave us in our sin as we deserve, but disciplines us to teach obedience. God's hand was heavy on Jonah, but in his mercy he provided the fish. The judgment on Jonah for his disobedience was tempered with mercy as he did not die. Hebrews 12:14 tells us that discipline leads to holiness, without which nobody will see God. Our Lord loves us so that he will not leave us to our own devices, but actively intervenes to correct us.
- We also learn from this passage that nothing hinders God from carrying out his sovereign and perfect plan. God commanded Jonah to go to Nineveh, the prophet disobeyed and suffered the consequences of his disobedience, but he wound up in Nineveh after all. In Acts 5 Gamaliel advises the council of the Pharisees regarding Peter and the other apostles:
 - **Acts 5:38-39** ³⁸ *So in the present case I tell you, keep away from these men [the apostles] and let them alone, for if this plan or this undertaking is of man, it will fail;* ³⁹ *but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them. You might even be found opposing God!" So they took his advice...*
- How foolish we are if we think we can oppose God and succeed! Jonah brought upon himself (Chapter 2) the near-death experience of drowning followed by three days and nights in uncomfortable accommodations. What mercy and patience God showed the prophet, sparing his life, the lives of the captain and the sailors, and reorienting Jonah toward his original mission (Chapter 3). Our Lord is in

absolute control and there is no place to hide from him. Jonah didn't honor God by his actions and he had three days in the fish to think about that. How merciful and loving the Lord Jesus is to bear with us and correct us despite our stubbornness and waywardness. He doesn't give up on us but perseveres through his Spirit to discipline us so that we are changed creatures.

- Are you running from God? Are you disobeying him as Jonah did? Is there an area of your life where you are willfully opposing God? If the answer is yes, then here is the solution: Turn from sin through repentance and faith and follow Jesus, whose perfect obedience has earned him a seat at the right hand of the Father. Let us call upon the Holy Spirit to enliven our hearts so that we turn from willful disobedience and bow to the will of our good and Sovereign God. Let us not be like Jonah, who rebelled against God, but let us be like the Lord Jesus who delighted in doing his Father's will (Jn 6:38), and who intensely sought the lost (Lk 19:10). Let us obey him because he is worthy of our worship, our praise, our obedience and our love. In following Christ, we will turn from the desperate disobedience of Jonah to the delightful duty and joy of obeying our Lord Jesus.