

**Jonah 1: 1-16; “God’s Determined Love for Jonah”, Sermon # 1 in a series –
“The Disobedient Prophet”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on
September 6th, 2020, in the Morning Worship Service.**

At first glance, the theme of this book appears to be – Jonah, thinking that he knew better than God. This is where all of Jonah’s trouble started. He thought that it was not right for God to tell him to go preach repentance to that great Gentile city of Nineveh. He objected even to the idea that God would show them that mercy. He says so in chapter 4. It displeased him greatly, and so he became angry about it. Why should God show mercy to the people who had been so wicked to Israel, and had actually done so many sinful things to them in the past? Why should God show mercy to their enemies? And so he became a disobedient prophet, and he took the ship going to Tarshish rather than going to Nineveh.

And yet, when we look more carefully at this passage, we find that the deeper theme of this book is God’s determined love for sinners, first of all, that the Ninevites would hear the gospel, and be saved. And then second, that even his disobedient prophet Jonah would be brought to a better obedience to Himself. He would patiently work with Jonah to bring him to a better understanding, and to an obedience which would glorify Him. And so, in this 1st message I would like to introduce this theme to you in a propositional form so that you will see the persevering love of God for His elect people. It is this – God has truly amazing ways of dealing with disobedience in His people; ways which they certainly will not escape learning, because He is a gracious, a faithful, and a merciful God. All of these Providential ways and means which He uses, do accomplish his objectives in the salvation of sinners and the sanctification of His servant Jonah. So let me open them up to you in the order in which they are given to us in this text.

1st of all – The Lord according to His Divine Providence gave Jonah a command and a choice. (verses 1-3)

“Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, ‘Arise, go to to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against it; for their wickedness has come up before Me.’ “But Jonah arose 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 from the presence of the Lord.” So we see here, that God in His providential ordering of things gave Jonah a command. And Jonah should have responded positively to that command and he should have immediately set out for Nineveh. But he did not. And so, when God saw that Jonah was not going to obey his command to go and to preach to Nineveh; that he had declined the call, God knew that He must address this disobedience in him. Obedience to God is a matter of your choice, dear Christian. God will providentially order things to test your obedience to him at many points, great and small. The issue is, whether you will comply and do what He is telling you to do in His word, or whether he will have to teach you by means of discipline.

Sometimes we think that God’s commandments are optional. We can take them or leave them according to our own thoughts about the matter. But you should know that ultimately God will not accept your reasons for disobeying His direct commands. He expects you to obey his commands and He will test you by further providence. Jonah happened to find another ship at anchor which was ready to go to Tarshish. This too, was God’s providence. But we need to see that it was only set before him for his convenience. God’s providence is never our duty, but it always involves a choice. He expects you, the one who knows Him, to follow the leading of His Spirit, into how His commands will be kept, and how the mission that He sends you on, will be fulfilled. You have a command given to you as a Christian – Go, therefore and make disciples of

all the nations, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you, and lo, I am with you always even until the end of the age.

God will test you in relation to this command by providentially ordering circumstances, and speaking to your heart in relation to this command. And He will know whether you are willing to learn from Him; how to be a good witness to people around you, of the truth of His word. He will be watching to see whether you will engage in good works to help people around you. He will see if you will speak to them words from His word. Oh, you say, that command of the Great Commission was given only to the apostles, and I am not an apostle. Yes, the Great Commission was given to the apostles, by our Lord, but it obviously did not stop with them, for He says to them – “Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” The apostles have not been around, here on earth, for two thousand years, but this command of the Great Commission is still in force today. You will recall in Acts chapter 8, that a great storm of persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered through the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.

But it says in verse 4, that those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word. They were not called heralds, like Philip, who went down to Samaria and preached Christ to them. They were your ordinary Christians who “gossiped the gospel”; who spoke God’s word to others, as often as they could, to as many as they would meet. Such should all Christians be, the word tells us; those who are not called to preach publicly as a pastor-teacher is called to preach. But God is still calling you as a Christian to preach to others, by the way that you live your life, and and by the witness of your life and your words, you should try to win others to a knowledge of the Savior. A Christian who is faithful realizes that they are called to teach others to observe all things which God has commanded of us, as Christians. The Great Commission was not only given to the apostles of that day, men who were faithful to their Lord and who went and preached the gospel to every creature, but it was given by Christ to His whole Church. And He meant the Commission to be undertaken by His Church in all generations.

For, how exactly do you preach the gospel to every creature anyway? It is by joining together with others in the Church of Jesus Christ. Christ needs His whole Church to be His witnesses to a lost and dying world; a world perishing for lack of knowledge. And where do your ordinary people of the world hear the gospel? From ordinary Christians, just as much as the pastor-teachers. Well, we see here that this was quite the extraordinary thing that Jonah was personally called to do as a prophet; to go to Nineveh, that great city, and to cry out against it; to proclaim to them that their wickedness had come up before God, and that God was intending to judge their whole city in particular. That they must repent, or else they would lose their city; their whole way of life, everything that they loved and cherished in their life would be taken away from them.

And what was worse, they would perish in their sins; they would not come to know the only true and living God, and have eternal life, if they did not heed the word of the Lord to them. Ah, this is what Jonah should have been thinking about. He should have been thinking about all of these people perishing. You and I must think often about this same sad truth; that without the preaching and sharing of the gospel, that people will perish. We have that gospel. We know the truth that has set us free. And so, if you would be faithful to God you will share the truth of the blessed gospel of Jesus Christ to people around you, as well. People must somehow come to understand that God speaking to them through His word. We must cry out, where it is needful, against their sins; yes we must point them out where we see that there is no recognition of them.

We must not decline to obey God’s command to preach to all kinds of people around us, everywhere; that we tell them that there is a God, and He is the only true and living God. Tell them that He expects all men everywhere to repent, for He has fixed a Day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through the Man whom He has appointed, our Lord Jesus

Christ, having furnished proof by raising Him from the dead. And we must tell them about Jesus' love for sinners; His perfect obedience to God's law on their behalf, and His sacrificial death on the cross to satisfy God's justice which is against them. We must attempt to rescue the perishing. This Jonah was unwilling to do, until God dealt with him in determined love.

2nd – God by His Divine Providence sent a great wind on the sea. (verses 4-10)

“But the Lord sent out a great wind on the sea, and there was a mighty tempest on the sea, so that the ship was about to be broken up.” “Then the mariners were afraid; and every man cried out to his god, and threw the cargo that was in the ship into the sea, to lighten the load.” “But Jonah had gone down into the lowest parts of the ship, had lain down, and was fast asleep.” “So the captain came to him, and said to him, ‘What do you mean, sleeper?’ “Arise, call on your God; perhaps your God will consider us, so that we may not perish.” “And they said to one another, ‘Come, let us cast lots, that we may know for whose cause this trouble has come upon us.’ “So they cast lots, and the lot fell on Jonah.” “Then they said to him, ‘Please tell us!’ “For whose cause is this trouble upon us?’ “What is your occupation?’ “And where do you come from?’ “What is your country?’ “And of what people are you?’ “So he said to them, ‘I am a Hebrew; and I fear the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land.’ “Then the men were exceedingly afraid, and said to him, ‘Why have you done this?’

This great wind was not something that just spontaneously happened to come up. The Lord “hurled a great wind on the sea”, it says in the New American Standard. The wind is something that the Lord brings according to His sovereign will. There is nothing in nature that happens randomly, like many people like to believe. There is no such thing as “mother nature”. It is true that the weather has certain patterns according to God's ordering, in various appointed places in the world, but nevertheless, God has perfect control of the weather, and these patterns; the storms and the calm, the good and the bad weather. All the weather is completely in our Father's all-knowing, all-powerful hands. It comes at His bidding, as it says in Psalm 135, verses 5-7 – “For I know that the Lord is great, and our Lord is above all gods.” “Whatever the Lord pleases He does, in heaven and in earth, in the seas and in all deep places.” “He causes the vapors to ascend from the ends of the earth; He make lightning for the rain; He brings the wind out of His treasuries.”

So, let us understand that the Lord knows how to use His wind to exactly accomplish His purpose at any given time. His purpose here was two-fold. It was bring Jonah to a sense of his shame concerning his sin; his disobedience in not doing what God had told him to do, to go and preach. He would show Jonah how sinfully unbelieving a man he was, to think that he could walk away from His command, resist His will, and not heed His word. And secondly, God would shame Jonah during the storm, in the presence of the other men on the ship, heathen men who worshiped other gods, false gods, so that they would come to know that there was, only one true God. Our God would prove this all-important truth to them by means of His wind. Sometimes God instructs unbelievers by His strong wind, and sometimes He reproves and rebukes believers by His strong wind as well. In the same storm that He brings, many people can be instructed. Such was the case here.

Now, each of us must understand that it is a very foolish thing to do, to think that you can flee from the presence of the Lord. Is not Psalm 139, verse 7 clear enough for any person to understand? The Psalmist says – “Where can I go from Your Spirit?” “Or where can I flee from Your presence?” “If I ascend into heaven, You are there; if I make my bed in hell, behold, You are there.” “If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there Your hand shall lead me, and Your right hand shall hold me.” Had Jonah forgotten these verses when he fled to Tarshish? I do not think so. I think that he was hoping that God would simply let him walk away from his calling as a prophet; that God would somehow understand; that he did not want to do this preaching, and his hope was, that God would not hold him

accountable for this disobedience, for personal reasons. His personal reasons may have been that he knew people who had been killed or mistreated by the Assyrians. Perhaps this was why he did not want to preach to them. Perhaps he had a very strong sense of judgment in this case; that he wanted God's vengeance to come upon this idolatrous, wicked people. It is as though Jonah wanted an exemption from preaching to the Ninevites because he was a conscientious objector. Only in this particular case, Jonah's conscientious objection was to their being shown mercy by God. But God was going to have none of it. There would be no excuse which Jonah could give which would satisfy God. God was going to correct His disobedient prophet.

Truly if we understand the Scriptures aright, there is no fleeing from God's presence. The Lord is immense. He fills all things. He is omnipresent. His eyes are in every place, beholding the evil and the good. Truly, if Jonah was afraid, or if he did not think that he was up to the task, he should have prayed the prayer of verse 23 – "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my anxieties; and see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting. But, I do not think that it was so much that Jonah was fearful, so much as he was unwilling to God's will. You will recall that this same thing happened to Moses when the Lord called him; to go and speak to the children of Israel, about his being raised up by God to this task. He said – Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring the children of Israel out of Egypt? The Lord said – I will be with you, and I will give you signs to perform.

Then Moses said – But, Lord, I am not eloquent. I am slow of speech and slow of tongue. And God said to him – And who made man's mouth? And who make the mute, the deaf, the seeing, or the blind? Have not I the Lord? Now, go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you should say. And Moses said – "O my Lord, please send by the hand of whomever else You may send. And it says that the anger of the Lord was kindled against Moses... This is the same kind of thing that was happening here with Jonah. And so, we must understand that the Lord was angry with Jonah, for he did not send a little wind to stir things up on the sea where the boat was, where Jonah was; He sent out a great wind on the sea. He hurled this mighty tempest on the sea, so that the ship was about to be broken up. Let us understand that the Lord knows just the degree of storm to bring to entirely accomplish His objective.

Has He not done the same thing with us, here in this community, through the mighty storm that He brought to us on the 10th of August? He took down many trees with his wind, but he did not take down all of our houses with it. Some houses were destroyed, but it could have been many more. Many trees went down, or massive limbs came crashing down, but many people have not seen God, as yet, in the storm. This is a time where it has become important for us to witness where we can, and to help people where we can. One of the great blessings of God's having brought this storm is the many people that Samaritan's Purse workers have gotten to witness to, and even lead to the Lord through this time of the cleanup. This storm was designed to awaken people to God's power; to awaken them to His sovereign right to bring judgment where He knows that it is warranted.

Sometimes people do not see this. But they will see the love and kindness of Christians in the good works that they do in such situations as this. During this storm that God brought upon the ship that Jonah was in, the mariners were afraid, it says in verse 5 and every man cried out to his god. But Jonah had gone below, down into the lowest part of the ship, and went fast asleep. He couldn't witness to them, he couldn't preach to them, because he was fleeing from the presence of the Lord. There was a good deal of selfish unbelief in Jonah at this time. He is like some Christians in our day who do not want to face the storms of life. They just want the world to go away, and get it off their shoulders. Sometimes it is that they really do not want to do what God would have them do, or be taught how they could do it, and so God has to show them their great unbelief and threaten consequences upon them for not doing His will.

In this case, he used the heathen sea captain coming down to him during the worst of the storm to question his behavior. “What do you mean sleeper? Rise and call on your God; perhaps your God will consider us, so that we may not perish.” Well, how right this statement was. God does similar things with us in our day as well. The religious devotion of people worshiping false gods sometimes puts us Christians to shame. When we ought to be praying, we are not praying, but they are. When none of their prayers will really avail, because they are not praying in the name of Jesus, ours would, if only we would pray! And so it says that they cast lots to determine for sure, who it was, the person who had caused them this trouble had come upon them. And the lot fell to Jonah. Once again, this shows us the providence and sovereignty of God.

Proverbs 16: 33 says – “The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord.” These men who did not know the Lord, they were acting in a more consistent God-honoring way than the disobedient prophet! The Lord revealed to them who the person was, who had caused these things to be sent to them all! They then ask him about himself, and he finally tells them that he is a Hebrew, that He fears God, imagine that! And that this God whom he fears is the God who made the sea and the dry land. It says in verse 10 that the men were exceedingly afraid, and they said to him – Why have you done this? Why have you fled from God? Because he told them that this was what he was doing!

Let us, my brethren, search ourselves, after a storm like the one that we have had here in Tama recently. Let us ask ourselves whether we are really doing all that the Lord would have us to do in regard to the evangelism of the people around us. Are we willing to go to preach to them, or speak to them about their need of repentance and faith? We should not only be willing, but we should seize the opportunity. How thankful I personally am that this is what our church did, in the meal that was served to the community. How thankful I am for the many opportunities that have come to us to speak to people of God’s power in the storm. Let us pray to be effective in our evangelism; to think of how we can more effectively share the gospel and the word of God with people in this community, and the communities that we represent.

3rd – God by His Spirit worked in the minds of these heathen mariners, to ask just the right question. (verses 11-16)

“Then they said to him, ‘What shall we do to you that the sea may be calm for us? – For the sea was growing more tempestuous.’ “And he said to them, ‘Pick me up and throw me into the sea; then the sea will become calm for you.’ “For I know that this great tempest is because of me.” “Nevertheless the men rowed hard to return to land, but they could not, for the sea continued to grow more tempestuous against them.” “Therefore they cried out to the Lord and said, ‘We pray, O Lord, please do not let us perish for this man’s life, and do not charge us with innocent blood; for You, O Lord, have done as it pleased You.’ “So they picked up Jonah and threw him into the sea, and the sea ceased from its raging.” “Then the men feared the Lord exceedingly and offered a sacrifice to the Lord and took vows.”

It is a very good thing when a sinner comes to the place where they will ask the question – What must I do to be saved? That is what these men were asking, in effect, in a temporal sense. What shall we do to you, Jonah, that the sea may become calm for us? Sinners today are faced with the storm of Divine Wrath coming upon them, and so we must ask this question – Is there something that sinners can do, in relation to the Lord Jesus Christ, so that this storm of Divine Wrath may pass from them, and cease? How can people find forgiveness, and peace, and all the blessings of eternal life? If you are a sinner you must see Jesus Christ as your substitute, and you must have your part in throwing Him overboard, so to speak; so that the sea which has been made turbulent by your sins, might be made calm, for you.

In Isaiah 57, verse 20, it says – “But the wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt.” “There is no peace, says my God, for the wicked.” You will

notice that these mariners did not want to throw Jonah overboard when they first heard from his lips what they should do. He told them that they should do that very thing. But they were desperate enough yet to believe that they needed to do that. They thought that if they just rowed hard enough, that they would still make it to the land and safety. But they could not. This should show us that some people, even after they hear the gospel, will not believe that they are so sinful but that they can somehow still be saved without Christ having to die for them. They think that they can work it out by their own efforts, by their personally trying to reconcile with God. But it is not possible to be saved by your own works or labors, on behalf of yourself, to be able to bring yourself out from under God's wrath, or to please Him by any works that you might do for Him. Only the sacrifice of Christ will satisfy God's wrath against you.

Therefore, seeing that their own rowing would not work, they finally prayed to Jonah's God, and what a good prayer it was! They cried out to the Lord, and they said – We pray, O Lord, please do not let us perish for this man's life, and do not charge us with innocent blood; for You, O Lord, have done as it pleased You.” And they picked Jonah up and threw him into the sea, and the sea ceased from its raging. You see, God did do what pleased Him in the death of His Son for sinners. It pleased the Lord to crush Him that He might make His soul an offering for sin. Jonah's asking these mariners to throw him into the turbulent sea is a picture of Christ who tells sinners everywhere – Look unto me all the ends of the earth, and be saved. He says – See me as your substitute for you at the cross; bearing your punishment of Divine Wrath which you so richly deserve. God is just and so He must punish you for your sins, if you are a sinner alone, without a substitute. Christ takes your place in judgment when you by faith, in your mind's eye, cast Him into the sea of the Divine wrath which belongs to you, by your choice of Him to be your substitute.

But God the Father, seeing that you have made Christ your substitute, He cannot punish you for any of your sins. He is unwilling to do so, because Christ's sufferings and death satisfied His justice, and the storm of Divine Wrath subsides. If somehow God were to continue to hold you under His Divine wrath, and punish you on the Judgment Day, He would be going against His own justice. He would be punishing twice for the same sins. But this cannot be, in the justice of God. The one believing in Jesus shall never perish. God must cease to be God, and cease to be just, if any sinner who is trusting in Jesus for the redemption of their soul, is not brought out from under the wrath of God and perishes in their sins. When these men threw Jonah overboard, it was just as he said – the sea became calm for them. And God tells us in Isaiah 57: 19 – “I create the fruit of lips: Peace, peace to him who is far off and to him who is near, says the Lord, and I will heal him.” The wicked are like the troubled sea, which cannot rest, yes it is true, but those who belong to Christ should no longer troubled by their sins, because they have perfect peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved.