

Series: *A Moody Missionary Meets the Merciful Master*

Lesson: *Deciding to Disobey*

Text: *Jonah 1:1-10 (L2)*

Date: *Sunday, September 11, 2011*

*Colonial Hills
Baptist Church*

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Key



= Teacher Information



= Discussion Starter

INTRODUCTION

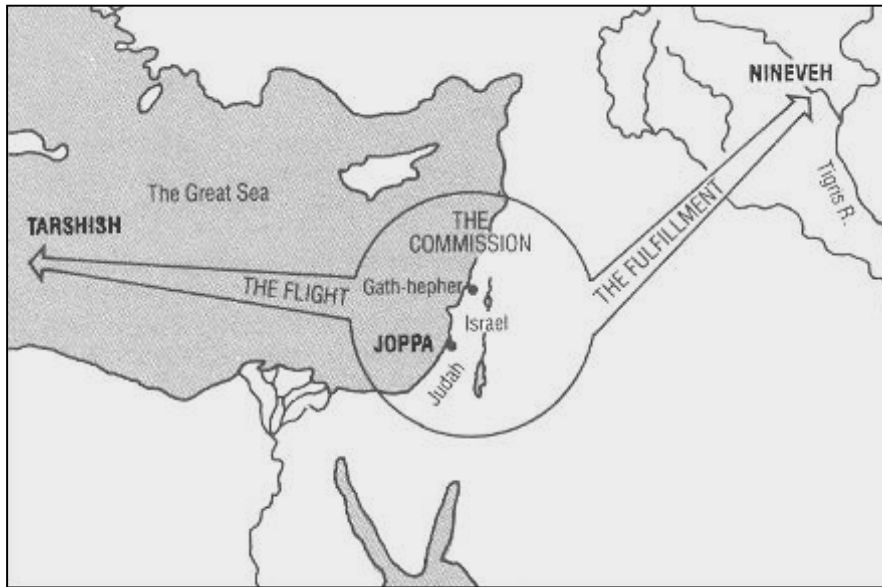
On February 3, 1990, in a small town outside Seattle, WA, a man by the name of David Zaback made what appeared to be his first attempt at armed robbery. That this was his first attempt seemed apparent both from his lack of a previous record of violent crime and his very foolish choices on that particular day. For example, the store he attempted to rob was H & J Leather & Firearms, a gun shop filled with gun-carrying customers. Furthermore, to enter the store, David had to step around a marked police car parked at the front door, and upon entering the building, he immediately spotted the police officer at the counter. Nonetheless, David announced a hold-up and fired a few wild shots. The officer and a clerk promptly returned fire, covered by several customers who also drew their guns. David, having been shot several times, died a few hours later.

Some people just make foolish decisions! "Served him right," we may say of David, "He certainly asked for that one!" Yet, many of us are guilty of a far more foolish and dangerous decision. This is the decision to disobey God.



It may be as minor as reading God's command to "[give] as God hath prospered him" (I Corinthians 16:2) and choosing instead to hoard one's income; it may be as common as understanding God's desire for us to "love your enemies" (Matthew 5:44) and instead becoming bitter; it may be as personal as feeling the biblical burden to "bring up [your children] in the nurture and admonition of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4) but opting instead to just give them what they want; perhaps it's as life-changing as knowing God's command to "be ye not unequally yoked" (II Corinthians 6:14) and still deciding to marry an unbeliever; it may be as grievous as having been lavished with the grace of God (Ephesians 1:6) but still determining not to share that with others.

As we turn back to the book of Jonah, we discover a prophet of the Lord learning what God's will is and choosing to turn from it. Jonah's story clearly demonstrates that *the decision to disobey God is a foolish and dangerous decision*. In fact, Jonah 1:1-10 offers five warnings about the decision to disobey.



THE DECISION TO DISOBEY GOD IS AN INSOLENT DECISION (vv. 1-3).

DISOBEDIENCE IS ALWAYS REBELLIOUS.

This should go without saying, but each of us is prone to minimize or excuse our own disobedience. James would remind the recipients of his letter that favoritism was not a “lesser sin”; to the contrary, it was just as sinful as committing adultery or murder (James 2:10-11). The decision to disobey, then, is nothing short of insolence (DEFINITION: “rude and disrespectful behavior”) and rebellion. This becomes obvious in light of a couple of considerations from this passage.

1. Consider Jonah’s heritage.

Today, names are frequently chosen based on personal preference or tastes; in Israel, names often carried a particular meaning (cf. Genesis 21:1-7; 25:21-26; Matthew 1:21). Jonah’s father was a man named, Amittai, meaning “truth” in Hebrew. Jonah’s name means “dove” which was most often associated with peace. In the very least, then, it seems that Jonah grew up in a family that would have fostered within him an appreciation for the truth of God and an understanding of the need to respond peaceably to that. Apparently, Jonah grew up in a home that strove to teach him submission to the will of God. Such instruction is being completely thrown off now.

2. Consider Jonah’s position.

Jonah was not only a “Hebrew” who “feared the LORD” (v. 9), as his parents had raised him; he was also one of the spiritual leaders among the Hebrews. God’s will for Jonah’s life was for him to be a prophet—the very spokesman for God. Jonah had the unique responsibility of being entrusted with “the word of the LORD” (v. 1). What a privilege! Unlike most others, God had spoken to Jonah in such a way as to bring him “into voluntary and intelligent participation in the divine plan for his life and for the peoples of the world in which he lives” (Kennedy).

Jonah had formerly fulfilled that call and preached a divinely-given message to the king of Israel (II Kings 14:25). That commission had been a very successful one, and God had been gracious to Jonah in that task. While most prophets had been sent to wicked kings to rebuke and condemn them, Jonah was sent to a wicked king to encourage and prophesy blessing to him. In light of God’s call upon his life and in light of God’s kindness in his last commission, Jonah should have responded to his next assignment with grateful obedience. Instead, he is completely rebelling against God’s will for his life.

3. Consider God’s command.

In verse 2, God’s command is specific: “Arise, go to Nineveh,...and cry against it.” Jonah’s response seems initially promising in verse 3, except that the verse begins with “but” or “instead.” While Jonah did arise, that was the only command he followed through on. God said, “Go”; Jonah “fled.” God said, “Nineveh”; Jonah decided “Tarshish.” There was nothing confusing about God’s command. Jonah simply rebelled.

Application: We must not deceive ourselves into considering our disobedience to be any less traitorous than it is. The decision to disobey demonstrates an insolent rebellion against the God who blessed you with a godly heritage (in life and/or in Christ [while not all have a rich earthly/physical heritage, all believers have a rich heavenly/spiritual heritage—cf. Ephesians 1:3-14; 2:1-10]), who has called you to minister His grace to the nations, and who had made His commandments clear and His burden light (cf. Matthew 11:28-30).¹

Transition: Not only is the decision to disobey an insolent decision that reveals a rebellious heart, but secondly, it is also...

¹ For more application on this point of Jonah’s insolence, consider Tchividjian, Tullian. *Surprised by Grace: God’s Relentless Pursuit of Rebels*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010. Pp. 30-35.

THE DECISION TO DISOBEY GOD IS AN IRRATIONAL DECISION (v. 3).

DISOBEDIENCE ALWAYS IGNORES TRUTH.

Jonah knew his doctrine. He knew that God was God alone and that He was a great God who “made the sea and the dry land” (v. 9). Jonah probably could have rattled off the attributes of God. However, verse 3 emphasizes twice that Jonah was attempting to flee “from the presence of the LORD.” Jonah simply acts irrational (DEFINITION: “not logical or reasonable”). See, disobedience requires us to commit practical atheism, for while we may say we believe certain facts about God, we are forced to ignore them in order to commit our sin. Three attributes of God, in particular, often seem to be overlooked in our decisions to disobey.

1. *Disobedience ignores God’s omnipresence.*

Jonah attempted to flee from the God of heaven. Certainly he must have recognized the folly of such an attempt; yet, he still ran. David had written years earlier in Psalm 139:7-12,

Whither shall I go from Thy spirit? Or whither shall I flee from Thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, Thou art there; if I make my bed in hell, behold, Thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there shall Thy hand lead me and Thy right hand shall hold me. If I say, “Surely the darkness shall cover me,” even the night shall be light about me. Yea, the darkness hideth not from Thee, but the night shineth as the day—the darkness and the light are both alike to Thee.

If Jonah was as familiar with the Psalms as his own song in chapter 2 suggests, he would have known the truths of which David wrote. Yet, such knowledge is being abandoned in a vain attempt to thwart God.



Application: While we may not be as obvious in our rejection of truth today, we still do our share of fleeing or hiding from God. Sometimes it’s evident in the ignoring of God’s Word; othertimes it’s obvious in the avoidance of God’s people. Most frequently, it’s simply demonstrated in a lack of awareness that “Thou, God, seest me” (Genesis 16:33; cf. Genesis 3:8; II Chronicles 16:9; Jeremiah 23:24; Hebrews 4:13). We diligently search for human accountability, while still failing to obey. Until we preach to ourselves the ever-present “presence of the LORD,” we will be little motivated to honor Him, especially in secret or when obedience seems confusing or difficult.

2. *Disobedience ignores God’s omniscience.*

The heart reason behind Jonah’s disobedience is discovered in chapter 4—Jonah was selfish and proud, willing to be a recipient of grace, but unwilling to dispense the same. However, as is true with our own disobedience, we usually come up with several reasons by disobedience is preferred or even justified. Several commentators have noted that one such additional reason that Jonah rebelled was probably that he feared being viewed as a traitor.

See, Jonah knew Nineveh. He was familiar with the idolatry, immorality, and brutality of Assyria that Nahum would write about 100 years later. And although that great nation was in a time of turmoil and weakness, Jonah’s contemporaries had been prophesying that Assyria would become God’s tool of judgment against Israel (Am. 5:27; Hos. 11:5). To now go and preach grace to them would be viewed as treason against his own country! To Jonah, God’s commission simply didn’t make sense—it didn’t seem right to go there!

Again, such a conclusion demonstrates that Jonah was ignoring, or at least forgetting, truth. He was overlooking the doctrine of God’s omniscience—that God knows all things intimately (Job 28:24; I John 3:20), including what was going on and what would go on in Nineveh (Jonah 1:2).

Application: What will help us obey God, even when His will seems confusing, contradictory, or foolish? The firm commitment to believing in and responding to the omniscience of God will remind us that God knows exactly what He’s doing in His commissioning of us. See, as long as we walk by sight and not by faith, that which is in fact irrational will appear to be rational. Only when the fear of God is cultivated and faith is practiced will we learn to trust the Lord, rather than our senses; then, through the eyes of faith, that which may appear irrational and confusing will be proved to be blessed of God.

3. *Disobedience ignores God’s protection.*

Another possible reason motivating Jonah’s disobedience was his fear of the dangers that awaited him in Nineveh. 7th century records reveal the superior Assyrian army to be very cruel. They would flay or burn their enemies alive, impale their bodies on stakes, or dimember them and pile their skulls outside their city walls.² As Jonah contemplates God’s call to go to Nineveh, the soon-to-be capital city of this ruthless nation, he undoubtedly fears for his life and flees for his safety. Again,

² Scott, Bruce. “Running from God.” *Israel My Glory*, May/June 2003, p. 12.

Jonah is acting irrationally, as he ignores the reality of God's protection. Jonah failed to preach to himself that "God's will cannot lead you where His grace will not keep you." He needed to remember Stonewall Jackson's assurance that "my religious beliefs teach me to feel as safe in battle as in bed."

Application: When obedience seems the more vulnerable or least comfortable decision, we must rely upon the protection of God.

Transition: We have seen that the decision to disobey is an insolent and irrational decision. Thirdly, it is...

THE DECISION TO DISOBEY GOD IS AN ILLUSIONARY DECISION (v. 5).

DISOBEDIENCE ALWAYS CARRIES THE ILLUSION OF PROSPERITY.

We wouldn't choose disobedience unless it seemed to offer something profitable. This passage suggests two aspects of this illusion.

1. **Disobedience may seem providentially provided.**

Verse 3 suggests the following sequence in Jonah's flight from God: he decided to go to Tarshish (probably 2,500 miles due west in Spain—the complete opposite direction from Nineveh), so he went to the nearest port city of Joppa, and he found a ship headed to Tarshish. "How fortunate!" Jonah may have thought. Exactly when he needed an exit route, he discovered the perfect solution.

2. **Disobedience may seem peacefully enjoyed.**

Verse 5 shows Jonah sleeping in the bottom of this ship. In spite of his obvious rebellion, Jonah was "fast asleep" even in the midst of a terrible storm. His decision to disobey didn't detract from his sense of peace, as he enjoyed a deep sleep.

"Certainly something this fortuitous could not be all that bad," Jonah may have reasoned. "If it feels so good and if I have such a peace about it, how can it be wrong?" he may have scoffed. Such lines of reason are dangerous ones!

Illustration: In his book *Of Wolves and Men*, Barry Lopez records that in order to kill a wolf, Native Americans would encase a sharp blade in fat and place it frozen upright on a block of ice. The wolf would cut itself while licking the blade and bleed to death.



Application: Sometimes, the most attractive and prosperous path is the wrong path. Such an illusion is what Solomon wrote of in Proverbs 16:25—"There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death." Reasoning that the "lucky circumstance" or the

"feeling of peace" vindicates our questionable decision is the very reasoning that keeps sinners far from the way of salvation, "for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat" (Matthew 7:13). The Puritans used to say, "The path of rebellion may at times be lined with roses" and "the ready way is not always the right way." Another commentator remarks, "One may be out of the way of duty and yet meet with a favorable gale." May we never look to our circumstances or feelings to assure us of our favor with God! Rather, His Word alone and our response to it should give us confidence that we are pleasing Him.

Transition: Not only is the decision to disobey insolent, irrational, and illusionary, but Jonah teaches us that the decision to disobey is also...

THE DECISION TO DISOBEY GOD IS AN INJURIOUS DECISION (vv. 3-6).

DISOBEDIENCE ALWAYS BRINGS CONSEQUENCES.

Notice two revelations of the injury of disobedience in this story.

1. **Jonah's injury symbolized.**

The author employs literary symbolism to depict the impending injury Jonah brings upon himself by his disobedience. He does so through the use of the Hebrew word *yarad*, meaning "to go down." In 1:3, the disobedient Jonah goes "down" to Joppa and "down" into the ship. In 1:5, he goes "down" into the cargo hold, and he eventually goes "down" into the depths of the sea (2:6). In stark contrast to this "downward" journey, Jonah later rejoices that God "brought up" his life from corruption (2:7). Nonetheless, as long as Jonah chose disobedience, He would sink down deeper into the injurious consequences of sin.

2. **Jonah's injury realized.**

Numbers 32:23 promises, "Be sure your sin will find you out." It "found out" Jonah, and he faced severe consequences. Shortly after the ship left port, the Lord sent out (literally "hurled") a huge storm into the Mediterranean Sea (v. 4), filling the boat with water and threatening to destroy it completely ("like to be broken"). Psalm 48:7 says, "Thou breakest the ships of Tarshish with an east wind." God was bringing that very power to bear in the chastening consequences being reaped by His runaway servant. The ship's sailors were seasoned veterans, but their response indicates they had never experienced a storm like this (vv. 5-6). Thus, they recognized that this was a storm of divine punishment (v. 7). Jonah was learning the warning of Proverbs 13:15—"The way of the transgressor is hard."

Ezekiel 18:33 confirms that—“When the righteous turneth from his righteousness and committeth iniquity, he shall even die thereby.”

Application: Disobedience always brings consequences. For the believer, the penalty of sin has been removed by Christ who bore the wrath of God for us. Nonetheless, “God never allows His children to sin successfully” (C. H. Spurgeon). Now or later (cf. II Corinthians 5:10), we will face the consequences. Consequences remind us of the destructive, albeit deceptive, nature of sin. Consequences demonstrate the love of God who will not allow us to be satisfied with anything other than Himself and His will for us. And consequences compel us to seek the forgiveness of God afresh and surrender to His will anew, so that we can experience His blessing again. The story of Jonah ought to be a sober warning to us—you cannot disobey God and get away with it!

Transition: A final warning about the decision to disobey is that...

THE DECISION TO DISOBEY GOD IS AN INFLUENTIAL DECISION (vv. 6-10).

DISOBEDIENCE ALWAYS AFFECTS OTHERS.

Our disobedience negatively affects others in at least three ways:

1. *Others are hurt by the consequences of our sin.*

Jonah was not the only one experiencing the consequences for his sin; the sailors did, too. They were being directly and harmfully influenced by his decision to disobey. Peace gave way to terror (vv. 5, 10) as they feared for their lives (v. 5), especially as the storm grew worse (v. 11). The sailors also had to sacrifice their cargo and any profit that would come from it (v. 5). This was all the result of Jonah’s sin, not their own. Instead of saving souls, Jonah had placed them in peril. Likewise, we must understand that we never sin in a vacuum (cf. Romans 14:7); others will experience the consequences of our sin.

2. *Others are hurt by the callousness of our sin.*

Had God not pursued His prophet, Nineveh would have gone unreached. One moment of callousness would have reaped the condemnation of thousands.

More immediately, Jonah’s hard-heartedness also affects the sailors. Apparently, Jonah had no concern for the peril that he had brought upon these poor sailors. While they were endangering their lives on the main deck, Jonah was fast asleep in the cargo hold (v. 5). While they were passionately intreating their vain deities for deliverance, Jonah was selfishly ignoring the only One who could actually provide

that salvation for them (vv. 5-6). Even though Jonah was a prophet of God, it was a heathen sailor that had to solicit Jonah’s prayers on their behalf (v. 6). While there was some hope that Jonah’s God would “think upon us that we perish not” (v. 6), Jonah had no such concern for the sailors. His calloused heart kept him from prayer and evangelism and caused harm to the needy people around him. Likewise, the icy fingers of disobedience often freeze our prayers and evangelism, too, potentially causing eternal harm to those around us who need salvation.

3. *Others are hurt by the inconsistency of our sin.*

A final effect of Jonah’s disobedience was a confusion among the sailors over his inconsistency. When providentially confronted with his sin (vv. 7-8), Jonah admits, “I am an Hebrew, and I fear the LORD, the God of heaven, which hath made the sea and the dry land” (v. 9). He also explained to them his attempt to “flee from the presence of the LORD” (v. 10). Their response is pointed—“Why hast thou done this?” (v. 10). Even these unbelieving sailors knew that one doesn’t run away from his god and get away with it, especially when your God turns out to be as real and as powerful as this God was! Fortunately, the power and grace of God overcame the unbelief and sin of these men, and they were later saved (vv. 14, 16). Oftentimes, however, it is the hypocrisy of those who claim to be born-again believers and followers of the Lord, but who continue in blatant and contradictory sin, that cause unbelievers to be repelled from the gospel.

Application: Disobedience is deadly (James 1:15), and it’s venom often affects many more than just us. When we decide to disobey, the consequences of that decision, the callousness of our heart, and the inconsistency of our lifestyle will influence those around us to their detriment.



CONCLUSION

The decision to disobey is never the right decision. God will not let us get away with that poor choice, as both the storm (v. 4) and the lot (v. 7) demonstrate. This story warns us that the decision to disobey is an *insolent* decision of rebellion against our riches in Christ, our position as God’s servant, and the beneficial commands of God. It’s also an *irrational* decision that forces us to ignore God’s omnipresence, omniscience, and protection. Furthermore, the choice is *illusionary*, as it seems to promise prosperity and peace. Finally, the decision to disobey is both *injurious* to ourselves and *influential* upon others, as they also deal with the consequences, callousness, and inconsistency of our sin.

As the captain implores Jonah to pray to his God in verse 6, Jonah was reminded that God *is* a compassionate God who loves to grant salvation. As Jonah comes clean to the sailors in verse 9, he remembers that God *is* a sovereign God, unthwartably in control of all things. So, in light of the compassionate control of God, the decision to disobey is also shown to be an *insane* decision. It is madness and folly to rebel against such benevolent power. Disobeying your good and great God is never smart, but is always foolish. That path may appear to be easy, but will always prove to be hard. The journey home, however, is simple. I John 1:9 encourages us, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Though we may choose the "downward" path of disobedience, God will "bring us up" from corruption (2:6), for "salvation is of the LORD" (2:9).