



## “Disobedience and the Discipline of God” Jonah 1:4-5

**Idea:** The Lord will wreak havoc and wreck the plans of those who disobey His commands.

**Intro:** God said, “Go!” And Jonah said, “No!”

This past week Kara and I spent a couple days in Williamsburg at a pastors and wives retreat. On Tuesday evening, Pastor Matt Carter preached the first session. He planted the Austin Stone Church in Austin, Texas twenty years ago. It is an incredible church that has reached and discipled many college and young professionals. Then a couple years ago, the Lord led Matt to relocate his family to the Houston area where he now serves as the senior pastor of Sagemont Church. The events leading up to his decision to leave the church he had founded and poured his life into for twenty years are fascinating. Matt shared the story with us as a way to encourage our commitment to the Lord’s calling on our lives.

You see about four years ago Pastor Matt began to wrestle with the thought of leaving the ministry. Unfortunately, pastors leave the ministry all the time. It is one of the great tragedies of our day. Most of the time, pastors leave the ministry due to some sort of moral failure. Thankfully, this was not the case for Matt. In fact, he was experiencing wonderful success. Lost people were being saved, baptized, and discipled in his church. His ministerial platform was growing. He was writing books, preaching conferences, and was in high demand. There was no moral decline or hidden sin in his life. There was just the feeling of a lack of fulfillment. Ministry was no longer fun. It had lost its luster. Matt was ready to do something different and tackle a new challenge.

What was once a vibrant walk with the Lord had been reduced to numbing work. Matt’s life had been radically transformed by Jesus during his freshman year at Texas A&M. During those early days of faith, he engrossed himself in God’s Word and prayer. He could not get enough of God’s presence. It was not long till he began to sense the Lord’s call to full-time ministry service. Matt was a pre-med major. He was planning to become a doctor and make a lot of money. For about a year, he wrestled with God’s call before surrendering. The Lord had other plans for him, so after seminary, Matt planted the Austin Stone Church. He immersed himself into pastoral ministry and enjoyed every aspect of preaching, counseling, vision casting, and leading. The church grew, the demands increased, and slowly he began to lose his passion for Jesus. How could that be? Well, he experienced what every pastor does...Sunday is always coming. Sermon prep and Bible study became work rather than devotion, and his heart grew dull. Jesus’ words in Matthew 13 reveal that this is where straying in the child of God begins.

*For this people's heart has grown dull, and with their ears they can barely hear, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and turn, and I would heal them.'* – Matthew 13:15

Matt was not finished with Christianity just his calling. He was sort of like Jonah. God had said, “Go,” and Matt was saying, “No.” In all reality, he and his wife had decided that he was finished and would soon step down. Not long after they had come to this decision, Matt was hunting with a friend. This friend was a billionaire who owned a large property investment company. Out of the blue, this friend asked Matt if he had ever considered leaving the ministry and doing something else. As you can imagine, this question was a surprise, and Matt answered honestly. “Actually, I have been thinking about that recently, and I have decided to leave.” he said. The friend explained that he thought he would be the perfect fit for a vice president’s position in his company. The salary would start out at \$1.2 million. How do you turn down that kind of offer? It was like the Lord was opening the door for them.

In the midst of that conversation, Matt’s phone rang. He did not recognize the number, so he declined the call. It immediately rang again, and he declined it a second time. Then the call came through a third time, so Matt answered. It was his doctor. The week before, the doctor had removed a mole off of Matt’s ear. The doctor called to tell him the pathology report revealed it to be cancerous. He had melanoma. Thankfully, they caught the cancer early, and it was easily removed. A couple weeks later, and after things settled down, Matt began to think about his friend’s offer. He picked up the phone to follow up with him. About that time, he got a call from the wife of one of his best friends. Her husband and Matt’s good friend had just dropped dead from a heart attack. That was a painful time, walking through grief with his friends. Then when things settled down after a couple weeks, Matt again began to consider the offer of \$1.2 million.

Not long after that, one Saturday while doing some hunting on his deer lease, Matt got a call from his teenage son’s phone, indicating he had been in a wreck. The signal was not good, but he was able to hear his son’s location before the call dropped. During that hour and fifteen-minute drive, which he made in forty-five minutes, Matt obviously thought the worst. He had no idea what condition his son was in after the wreck. He had a loud, one-sided conversation with the Lord all the way to the hospital. When he arrived, he learned that the vehicle had rolled multiple times, but his son walked away with just a few scratches. The accident and the thought of his son dying shook Matt. He could not help but wonder why God was allowing all these bad things to happen in his life? He called his executive pastor and told him there was no way he could preach the next day.

On Sunday, Matt really had no desire to go to church. He went anyway because he was the pastor, but his heart was not in it. The visiting preacher was a friend of his, but he had no idea what he would be preaching. As the sermon began, he quickly learned that it would be from Jonah 1:3-4. Jonah was running from God, and the Lord hurled a great storm on him. Can you imagine the timing? The preacher was describing the events taking place and why the storm came upon the sea. Then all of a sudden, he stopped and asked for people to stand who sensed that the Lord was sending a storm after them. No one stood up. Matt’s heart felt the conviction of the Lord. It had become dull, but for the first time in a long time, it was sensitive. Matt, the senior pastor of the Austin Stone Church, stood up in front of everyone. He had been running from God’s call on his life. He had been manufacturing a way out of it. He confessed this to the Lord and came home. The Lord in that moment healed his heart and restored his passion for God and ministry.

There are times in our lives when the bad things happening all around us can only be explained by recognizing that their source is God. This happens because as Eric Redmond states, “The Lord will make a storm to wreak havoc and wreck our plans when we readily dismiss obedience to His command.” This was Jonah’s experience.

[Read Jonah 1:4-5.](#)

**Inquiry:** As we have seen, Jonah is the story of a man who is on the run from God, seeking to subvert His will. He is the prophet of God. He has been used of God to strengthen and expand the borders of Israel (2 Kings 14:23-25). He follows in the line of great men of God such as Elijah and Elisha. However, over time Jonah's heart has grown dull. His ears can barely hear the Word of the Lord, and his eyes have closed. His subtle disregard for God's Word has resulted in rebellion. He has rebelled against God's command to go, which in reality was a rejection of God's Lordship over his life.

Jonah went down to Joppa and found a ship that would take him as far as possible from the Lord's call on his life. In response to his disobedience and outright rebellion, God hurls "*a great wind upon the sea.*" Storms are common on the Mediterranean Sea, and the mariners surely had experienced just about every storm imaginable. This particular storm, however, was different. It was so intense that the ship "*threatened to break up.*" The text in verse four could be translated, "the ship was determined to break up." The mariners recognized that this storm had a divine aspect to it. To their credit they discerned that it was a divine reaction toward some kind of sin, so they each cried out to their individual gods. According to Frank Page, "the ancient Near East's religious environment included devotion to a multitude of protecting spirits, patron deities, lower echelon gods and goddesses and senior members of the Pantheon, which gave rise to an extremely confusing situation." The dire situation compelled them to call upon any and every god that might be the cause behind the storm. At the same time, they did whatever they could to save themselves, so they threw the cargo overboard in order to lighten the ship.

In the midst of the storm that terrified those experienced sailors, we find Jonah asleep. As Leslie Allen explains, "the storm that so alarmed the crew served only to rock Jonah into deeper slumber, blissfully unaware of all the trouble he is causing." He was as dead to the world as he was to God. The storm would serve its purpose. Jonah's disobedience was being met with God's disciplining hand. There are four things for us to learn from these verses.

### **1. God always responds to sin.**

*Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap.* – Gal 6:7

When a crime is committed justice is desired. We inherently know that justice should be served against those who steal, kill, or harm others. Where does this inherent desire originate? It comes from God. The Bible portrays Him as just and righteous.

*For the Lord is a God of justice...* – Isaiah 30:18

*For I the Lord love justice; I hate robbery and wrong; I will faithfully give them their recompense...*  
– Isaiah 61:18

*For the Lord is righteous; he loves righteous deeds; the upright shall behold his face.* – Psalm 11:7

The testimony of Scripture is that God always responds to sin. He never glosses over it. He did not gloss over Adam's sin in the Garden. He did not disregard the sin of man during the days of Noah, the sin of King Saul when he offered the sacrifice, or the adultery of King David. He always responds to sin justly and righteously, which means He always responds to your sin. As a good Father, God disciplines His children.

### **2. God's discipline is measured to get the attention of the sinner.**

When Jonah fled and came to Joppa, he found exactly what he wanted. He found a ship that would take him as far away from God's calling on his life as possible. It is very likely that Jonah might have recognized it as the Lord's favor, solidifying his warped justification for his rebellion. Yet, the ship

anchored in the Joppa harbor, as Sinclair Ferguson points out, “was not meant to be a means of escape from God’s clearly revealed Word, but the most terrible instrument in the hands of God to bring His servant back to his senses.”

The Lord will hurl storms at His children to the degree needed to turn them from their sinful ways and back on track in His will. He did it in Matt Carter’s life, and He did to Jonah. In those two situations, the storms were specific and unique. Sometimes the storms are not unique. Instead, they are the natural results and consequences of sin. King David, for example, experienced his own storm after his affair and cover-up. Many scholars believe the twelve to eighteen months between David’s sin and Nathan’s rebuke were spiritually dry. Surely, David was aware of his sin, but he refused to repent. When the rebuke did come from the prophet and his sin exposed, the storm morphed into more than simply a spiritual desert. It brought about the death of his newborn son.

We should never think that we can sin against the Lord and be immune from its consequences. The Bible makes the exact opposite abundantly clear.

*<sup>12</sup> If a man does not repent, God will whet his sword;  
he has bent and readied his bow;*

*<sup>13</sup> he has prepared for him his deadly weapons,  
making his arrows fiery shafts.*

*<sup>14</sup> Behold, the wicked man conceives evil  
and is pregnant with mischief and gives birth to lies.*

*<sup>15</sup> He makes a pit, digging it out,  
and falls into the hole that he has made.*

*<sup>16</sup> His mischief returns upon his own head,  
and on his own skull his violence descends.*

– Psalm 7:12-16

God’s discipline is measured to bring His child back to obedience.

### **3. The consequences of sin are not isolated to the sinner.**

Just as in the case of King David, Jonah’s sin did not just affect him. The sailors were impacted too. They were caught up in the storm. Their lives were being harmed. The ship was threatening to break up and all lives would have been lost. On top of that, by refusing to go to Nineveh and preach to those pagan idolaters, the Ninevites were in spiritual danger. Those who died during Jonah’s flight, immediately experienced a devil’s hell. The wrath of God was poured out on them because of their rebellion against God.

We must recognize from Jonah’s story that each rebellious act we make affects everyone in its wake. When you refuse to share the gospel with a friend or neighbor, that person is in danger of missing heaven and going to hell. When you choose to throw away your marital vows, it affects your spouse, children, testimony. It is the same for the other person. There are consequences for our sin, and sometimes the Lord will hurl a unique storm toward His child, which brings its own set of collateral damage.

### **4. Sinful engagement can numb you to its effects.**

In the midst of this one-of-a-kind storm, Jonah is asleep. The sailors are overwhelmed. They are praying to their gods. They are doing everything they know to keep the ship upright. All the while, Jonah is numb to the whole thing. The storm actually rocked him into deeper slumber.

Scholars offer several reasons for Jonah's sleep, such as emotional exhaustion, depression, and physical fatigue from his hasty flight. Whatever the reason, what is clear is that in the midst of the storm, Jonah was numb toward the very thing God sent to arouse him. How does this happen?

*For this people's heart has grown dull, and with their ears they can barely hear, and their eyes they have closed... - Matt 13:15a*

Sin numbs a believer's sensitivity to God. Subtle disregard for and disobedience to God's Word little by little numbs you to its effects. Your world could be burning down around you, and you have no idea it is the result of your own choices. You are oblivious and fail to see God's hand over it.

The thought of being numb to God's discipline ought to shake us today.

**Conclusion:** God said, "Go!" And Jonah said, "No!"

He found a ship going to Tarshish and went down into it. He found exactly what he wanted. Mac Brunson has said, "When a man seeks to move away from God, it is always down."

Jonah's "No" shows us that rebellion against God's call is a rejection of God Himself. It also shows us that disobedience brings the discipline of God. He is just and righteous. God is a good Father, and a good father disciplines his children.

How do we keep ourselves out of these storms? How can we walk in obedience and free from God's discipline?

### Two Preventative Actions

1) Obedience to God's Word

The safest thing you can ever do is obey. You will never be in danger of the consequences for disobedience if you do not disobey. Let's read the Word, and let's obey the Word.

2) Abiding in God's presence

Jonah rose to flee from God's presence. Sin always seeks to remove you from the presence of God. Stay close and clean. Better yet, stay close to stay clean.

What in your life has the Lord put His finger on today? As a Christian, has He revealed an area of sin that needs to be confessed and repented? Will you listen and obey, or will you run and hide? Running is futile. Ask Jonah about it. If the Lord has revealed an area in your life, He stands ready to forgive and cleanse.

Maybe, today you recognize your need for Jesus as Lord and Savior. You know that you are broken, and you understand He can restore the broken areas of your life. What is keeping you from rising and coming to Jesus?

Good news: God loves you. He created you and desires to know you.

Bad news: You are a sinner in rebellion against your Creator.

Best news: God has done everything necessary to justly deal with your sin and bring forgiveness and restoration to your life. Today, He calls you to turn from your sin and self and turn to Him as Savior and Lord. Have you received forgiveness in Christ?

Let's no longer run from God. We have had enough of His disciplining hand. Let's turn to Him in faith and repentance.