



“Disobedience and the Rejection of God” Jonah 1:1-3

Idea: Rebellion against God’s call is a rejection of God Himself.

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

A mother of three unruly preschoolers was asked whether she would have children if she had to do it all over again. Sure,” she responded, “just not the same three.” One cannot help but wonder if this is how the Lord feels about His children at times. Disobedience is never an option in God’s family, and it was not an option in the home I grew up in as a kid. Of course, I attempted on a number of occasions to test the waters and express my independence. In each situation, I learned that decision was not in my best interest.

I doubt many kids ever fully understand why their obedience is important. Most likely they just know that obedience is important because disobedience brings negative consequences. In reality, it is so much more than that. As a parent, I have come to understand what I never did before having children. I now know that disobedience is not just a rejection of your parents’ rules; it is a rejection of the parents themselves. In essence, it is saying, “I know better than you, and I do not need your protection...I do not need you.”

The prophet Jonah emphatically disobeyed God’s command and call on his life. Last Sunday, as we did an overview of this dramatic tale, we learned that Jonah is the story of a man who is on the run from God. But he is not just on the run from God; He is actively seeking to subvert the will of God. We also learned that God’s will cannot be subverted. Our decision as a follower of Jesus to respond or not respond to God’s call will not determine the outcome of God’s will. The Lord will do one of two things: 1) He will get His child back in His will, or 2) He will move on to someone else.

Today, as we look at the opening verses of Jonah, I want us to contemplate disobedience and the rejection of God. What we discover in Jonah’s “No” is that rebellion against God’s call is a rejection of God Himself. His rebellion was more than just simple disobedience to a command. It was a rejection of God’s Lordship over his life.

Read Jonah 1:1-3.

Inquiry: God issues a great call to the prophet. The text reads “*the word of the LORD came to Jonah.*” This expression is significant. It is used seven times in the four chapters of Jonah. It is used over 90 times in the Old

Testament. For example, the word of the Lord came to David, Abraham, Solomon, Jehu, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, and Jonah. In fact, you can write your name there. If you know Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, you can write, “The word of the Lord came to Bobby, Leslie, Andrew, John, Katy, and Nancy. If you are saved, if you are in relationship with Jesus, the word of the Lord has come to you. This is not a word of salvation or to salvation (1 Cor 1:9). When the word of the Lord came to these heroes of the faith, they were already in the faith. The word they received was a call to service. It was a call to a specific task. The same is true for us today. As followers of Jesus, the word of the Lord has come to us with a call to serve.

You have probably heard people say, “I have always wanted the Lord to use me in some way.” I have two responses to that statement. If you do not know how the Lord wants to use you, then:

1) You might not be listening.

God is always speaking to you. The fact that you have not heard Him says more about your inability or unwillingness to hear than it does about God.

2) You might have said no.

It is possible to tell the Lord no so much that He eventually stops calling you to service.

A lot of times the excuse behind people’s “no” involves perceived giftedness. They may say, “Well, that is not my area of giftedness, talent, or ability. It is just not my thing.” The call to service for Jonah was a call to go preach. The call for us to serve is largely a call to go preach. This call does not come down to whether or not you have the giftedness or talent to share the gospel. It comes down to whether or not you will be obedient. When God calls you to share His Word, He is not looking for your level of talent and ability. He is looking for your level of obedience.

The word of the Lord came to Jonah, and it told him to go to Nineveh and preach. This city was the legendary capitol of the Assyrian Empire. The Assyrians are known to have been some of the cruelest people to walk the earth. They were brutal. Historians tell us that Ashurbanipal, the grandson of Sennacherib, was accustomed to tearing off the lips and hands of his victims. Tiglath-Pileser flayed victims alive and made great piles of their skulls. Jonah was called of God to go and preach against their sin and wickedness. His response was a resounding NO!

As God’s man and prophet, obedience, obviously, was not up for debate. Pragmatically though, what would have been some reasons for him to be obedient?

- His call as a prophet.

Jonah was God’s servant (2 Kings 14:25). He was called to advance God’s Kingdom through obedience to His will. He belonged to the privileged band of men who stood in the presence of God and felt the pressure of His will upon their spirits. They heard His unmistakable voice telling them what He was about to perform among the nations. They were charged with bringing God’s people under the practical authority of His Word. It would make sense that his inclusion in this order would ensure his obedience.

- His predecessors.

Jonah’s immediate predecessors in the prophetic ministry were Elijah and Elisha. During their lifetime God had broken through the silence of previous generations and was once again raising up His servants to speak His Word with grace and power. These two men were called to hard ministries. Elijah preached against the sin of King Ahab and his wife Jezebel. Elisha healed Naaman, the commander of the Syrian army of leprosy. Against the backdrop of sin and rebellion these two prophets of God stood out as glimmers of hope. Jonah appears to have been one of this new order of prophets.

- His past successes.

2 Kings 14:23-25 suggests that Jonah’s service was crowned with a measure of fruitfulness. People would have remembered what he preached, and they knew it had been fulfilled. The true test of a

prophet in the Old Testament was whether or not what he said came true. Jonah forecasted the extension of Israel's border by Jeroboam II, and it happened, strengthening the nation.

Based on these three things, pragmatically, it would make sense for Jonah to obey the Lord's command. What would be some reasons for his disobedience?

- His hatred of the Ninevites.
Jonah was a racist. Culturally, this was understandable. I am not saying it was right; it just made sense. At this point in history, the Jews despised all peoples outside the Hebrew people. In their minds, there were only two classes of people: Hebrew and Gentile. The Jewish people would not associate with Gentiles. On top of the fact that the Ninevites were Gentiles, they were also an evil, wicked, and brutal people. They had done great harm to God's people. Jonah makes clear his hatred for them in 4:2. Therefore, one could understand his disobedience.
- His fear of his people.
This reason for disobedience is a stretch because it is not found in the text. For the sake of argument, however, let's consider it. The Jews knew Jonah to be a prophet of God. Through his preaching Israel had been strengthened against its enemies. What would his brethren think and how would they feel if he went to Nineveh to preach? They knew God was gracious and merciful, and they hated the Ninevites too. The societal pressure would have been heavy on Jonah.
- His subtle disregard for God's Word.
The prophets often described the sharpness of receiving God's Word as a sword in their spirits, a burden on their shoulders, and a hammer breaking their rocky hearts. Jeremiah described it as a raging fire shut up in his bones that he could not contain (Jer 20:9). Jonah had once experienced and enjoyed this kind of relationship with God's Word. What the Lord spoke, the prophet quickly delivered. It would seem, then, that he would have quickly delivered the message to Nineveh. But instead of rising to preach, he rose to flee. Why the change? It could have been the result of subtle and ongoing disregard for God's Word. It started small and full of guilt, but over time it became bigger and no big deal.

Illust: When Chuck Swindoll was a boy, he ran a paper route for the *Houston Press*. One afternoon he was coming to the end of his route. It had been a long day, which began with rolling two hundred papers. After the route was finished and Chuck was biking toward home, he came to the backyard of a large home at the corner across the street from his house. He thought to himself, "I am tired. There is no need to go all the way down to the end of the street and around this yard. I will just cut across and be home in a jiffy."

It was a quick shortcut, and Chuck knew whose home this was. The owner was meticulous about his yard. The grass was plush and beautiful. As soon as his tires began to roll over the lawn, he was flooded with guilt. He squelched it by figuring it will not hurt this one time. The next day, he came up to the backyard again on his way home. He was again tired and decided to cut through. He knew it was wrong, but there was less guilt. In less than two weeks a clear path had been made by his bike tires. By the end of the third week, a small but obvious sign had been placed near the sidewalk, blocking the path. "Keep Off!!" Everything but his name was on the sign, but Chuck ignored it and went around the sign.

What began as a subtle and guilt-ridden disregard turned into open and guiltless disregard. It is very likely that this too is how Jonah's disregard for God's Word began. For this reason, it is critical that we always respond immediately, obediently, and faithfully to God's Word.

How does Jonah's story relate to our story as followers of Christ? Jonah was called to go and preach against sin. Christians are called to go and make disciples (Matt 28:18-20). Evangelism is at the forefront of the Book of Jonah. God is gracious and merciful. He abounds in love and finds no joy in disaster (4:2; 2 Pet 3:9). Jonah

refused to be the prophet who brought the Word of God to a sinful people. His disobedience was a rejection of God Himself. His rebellion was more than just simple disobedience to a command. It was a rejection of God's Lordship over his life.

What can be learned about disobedience from this passage?

3 Realities of Disobedience

1. Disobedience breeds disobedience.

Jonah rose to flee (1:3). Disobedience is a slippery slope. It begins by disregarding God's Word. The first time is always the hardest. Then it gets easier with each deviant act.

The Bible does not give us a full description of how Jonah walked away from the Lord and His Word. We can only speculate, but I believe it is safe to say that it began subtle and became more pronounced.

Appl: Christian, in the area of evangelism, it might look like the following. God's Spirit has tapped on your heart with a verse like Romans 6:23. The wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus. Or He opened your heart to God's love for sinners through 2 Peter 3:9. He wishes that none should perish but instead wants all to come to repentance. You realize that the Lord has done this great work in your life. You also realize that your friend desperately needs what you have in Christ. You sense the Lord calling you to go and tell this friend about Jesus. Unfortunately, for whatever reason, you never get around to sharing the gospel with your friend the next time you are together. This disobedience leads to a similar disobedience. On and on it goes. You never open your mouth to share with your friend. After a while, you begin to think that evangelism is only for pastors and really is not that important. In fact, there are better ways for the church to use their resources than evangelism.

2. Disobedience prefers darkness over light.

Mac Brunson has said, "When a man seeks to move away from God, it is always down." Jonah went down to Joppa. He went down into the ship (1:3). Jonah went down into the inner chambers of the ship to sleep (1:5). He was thrown down into the sea (1:12, 15). While in the fish, he went down deep into the sea (2:3).

Jonah fled from the presence of the Lord. He wanted to get as far away as possible lest the Lord shed light on his rebellion and change his heart.

Non-evangelistic Christians (if there even is such a Christian) do not like sermons on evangelism. They do not like being challenged to share the gospel or live on mission. They would prefer to hear self-help messages that make them feel good. They will even take messages on doctrine as long as it does not ask them to talk about Jesus with anyone. They would prefer their disregard for the Great Commission to remain in the dark instead of being drug out into the light where they are forced to confront it.

3. Disobedience causes you to act like an unbeliever.

We all view life through a certain lens. This lens is our worldview. Right now, the world in which we live is chaotic and seems to be spinning out of control. Most people are losing their minds. There is deep division as people rally around their ideological positions. Christians are caught up in this mess too. In fact, we sometimes are the ones who act the worst.

Matt Chandler has been making a statement to his church that resonates with me. He says, "We were built for this moment." Rather than engaging in the division and rhetoric, Christians ought to be ones

who stand up and offer love, hope, and peace. There ought to be a saneness to our lives. It should be evident to people.

The mariners did not recognize Jonah as a follower of God. When the storm was raging they cast lots, which fell on Jonah. They asked who he was, where he came from, and what he did. They had no clue. Jonah was just another pagan to them. His disobedience caused him to live like an unbeliever.

Lost people do not view the world through a biblical and Christological lens. They do not recognize the sovereignty of God over every situation. Therefore, they understandably react differently than Christians. Everything is changing in our world right now, and not much of it is for the better. Our Christian nation is in the rearview mirror. The America we once knew is being redefined. I do not like it. It saddens me. I am concerned for my children and their children.

How should we as Christians respond to the change taking place?

We hold high the Word of God. We lean in to the Holy Spirit's leadership. And we offer the gospel to a people and a culture who desperately need it. A transformative encounter with Jesus Christ is the only hope for our nation. I am all for believers standing against the encroachments of liberalism and socialism in our culture. It is good and right for us to oppose teachings that are wrong and even evil. It is this conviction that has me considering a run for the District 4 seat on the school board. While this fight is important and necessary, we need to understand that morality and ethics cannot be legislated. The true change needed has to take place from the inside out, and only the gospel can bring about that change.

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

Jonah's "No" shows us that rebellion against God's call is a rejection of God Himself. His rebellion was more than just simple disobedience to a command. It was a rejection of God's Lordship over his life. God wants us to see more than just a dramatic tale in Jonah's story. He wants us to see ourselves and the subversiveness of our hearts.

How often do we blatantly disregard God's Word? He says, "Don't do it." And we, because we know better than God, do it anyway. That act of disobedience leads to more disobedience. Then because we love our sin and want to keep it, we refuse to allow it to be exposed in the light. We end up living like unbelievers rather than those who have been transformed by the gospel. These three realities are true for all our sinful ways.

Evangelistically, it is true too. God has called you as a believer to go. You are to go to your family, the neighbor next door, your coworker, your classmate, the store clerk, and the peoples of the world. How have you been responding to that call to go? When was the last time you had a gospel conversation with a lost person with the hopes of leading the person to the faith? What is keeping you from rising and going to others with the gospel?

For some today, the question you need to answer is, "How much longer am I going to say no to God's invitation?" The Lord is calling you to Himself. He has put His finger on and exposed your sin. He stands ready to forgive and cleanse. 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?

May we no longer walk in disobedience. May we no longer reject God and His Lordship over our lives.