

# The Path of Disobedience

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- [ 0 : 0 0 ]     Welcome to our services today. As we come together to worship the Lord, we seek his blessing.
- Let us unite together in prayer. Eternal and ever-blessed Lord, we give thanks unto thee that we have access to thy throne of grace.
- That we can come with fullness and with confidence through the merits of thy Son, our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.
- And as we come together in this act of worship, we seek, O Lord, that it may please thee to grant to us thine own spirit.
- To enlighten our understanding and to open our hearts to thine own word.
- [ 1 : 0 8 ]     And that thy spirit would apply thy word to our hearts. That it may be lodged in our hearts and bring forth evidence in our lives.
- O Lord, the words of thy servant of old are the words that we would desire to utter on upon our own lips.
- Show me thy ways, O Lord. Thy paths, O teach thou me. And do thou lead me in thy truth, therein my teacher be.
- For thou art God that does to me salvation's end. And I upon thee all the day, expecting to attend. And we pray, O Lord, that as we come together, thou desirest that we would magnify thine own name.
- That we would honour thine own name. For, O Lord, we are so conscious of our own sin. We are so conscious of our own shortcomings and failures.
- [ 2 : 2 3 ]     But blessed be thy name. That thou art the God who knows the desires of our heart. That thou art the God who suches the heart.
- And thou knowest, O Lord, that our desire is that thine own name may be glorified and magnified. In everything that we do.
- In our walk, in our talk. In every place where our providence may lead us. That, O Lord, that thine own name would be uplifted.
- That we would show forth thine own grace, thine own compassion and mercy in our lives. That we would have a Christ-centred life.
- We confess our sins before thee, O Lord, and seek that cleansing which thou alone can give to us. We give thee thanks for the efficacy of the finished work of thy son.
- [ 3 : 3 2 ]     And for his continual ministry at thine own right hand. And for the great promise of his return. We ask, O Lord, that thou would bless our communities.
- That thou would bless every home and every family. That thou would meet with each one at their point of need. And we pray, O Lord, for those who are ill.
- May thy healing hand be upon them. And those who mourn over the passing of loved ones. We pray, O Lord, that thou would straw near to them.

And we pray, O Lord, that thou would bless those who have come to elderly years. Those who are on their own. Those who feel lonely tonight. O Lord, that thou wouldst be near to them.

And we pray, O Lord, that thou would grant wisdom to those who govern over us. O Lord, remember us as a nation, we pray thee.

[ 4 : 36 ] Grant to us the grace of repentance. That we would come and that we would sorrow over our sins. And that we would seek the mercy of God in Jesus Christ.

Be mindful, O Lord, that righteousness alone exalted a nation. O Lord, we pray, O Lord, we pray that thou would bless thy gospel as it is being proclaimed.

And all thy servants who have gone forth with thy word tonight. May they know the unction of thine own spirit upon them. O Lord, we are dependent upon thee.

We are dependent upon thy spirit to come and to take thy word. And to lodge it in the hearts of our people. We are dependent upon the drawing power of thy spirit.

Upon thy spirit to enlighten the understanding of our people. So that they would see Christ. While he is to be found.

[ 5 : 43 ] And call upon him. While he is near. We give thee thanks, O Lord, for all the opportunities that thou didst give to us. To proclaim the gospel.

And to show the gospel forth and practice in our lives. And from day to day. We ask, O Lord, that thou would continue with us.

And forgive us for all our sins. In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. We shall now read the word of God.

As we find it in the book of Psalms. In the book of Psalms. And Psalm 139. O Lord, thou hast searched me.

And known me. Thou knowest my down-sitting. And my uprising. Thou understandest my thought afar off. Thou compasses my path.

[ 6 : 43 ] And my line down. And art acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word in my tongue. But lo, O Lord, thou knowest it to all together.

Thou hast beset me behind and before. And laid thine hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me. It is high. I cannot attain unto it.

Whether shall I go from my spirit. Or whether shall I flee from thy presence. If I ascend up to 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 thine hand lead to 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. And the darkness and the light are both alike to thee.

[ 7 : 42 ] For thou hast possessed my reins. Thou hast covered me in my mother's womb. I will praise thee. For I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Marvellous are thy works.

And that my soul knoweth right well. My substance was not hid from thee. When I was made in secret. And curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Thine eyes did see my substance.

Yet been unperfect. And in thy book all my members were written. Which in continuance were fashioned. When as yet there was none of them. How precious also are thy thoughts unto me.

O God, how great is the sum of them. If I shall count them, they are more in number than the sand. When I awake, I am still with thee.

Surely thou wilt slay the wicked, O God. Depart from me therefore, ye bloody men. For they speak against thee wickedly. And thy enemies take thy name in vain.

[ 8 : 43 ] Do not I hate them, O Lord, that hate thee. And am I not I greed with those that rise up against thee. I hate them with perfect hatred.

I count them mine enemies. Search me, O God. I know my heart. Try me. I know my thoughts. And see if there be any wicked way in me.

And lead me in a way everlasting. May the Lord bless unto us that portion of his own word. Now, seeking the Lord's blessing, we will turn to the prophecy of Jonah.

To the book of Jonah. And chapter 1. And we shall read from the beginning. Now the word of the Lord came unto Jonah, the son of Amittai, saying, Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it.

For their wickedness has come up before me. But Jonah rose up to flee into Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. And went down to Joppa, and he found a ship going to Tarshish.

[ 9 : 52 ] So he paid the fare thereof. And went down unto it to go with them into Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. Now this is a short book of the Bible.

It has only four chapters, 48 verses, and so it can be read very quickly. And last week we noted that the book was incredibly significant, especially in pointing us to the breadth of God's grace and mercy.

This, it seems, was one thing that was so difficult for Jonah to accept, the inclusion of the Gentiles into God's redemptive plan.

It is a book about God's grace to sinners, not only among the Jews, but also among the Gentiles. It is a book about one of God's servants who received a call from God, but was disobedient to that call.

It is a book that strongly warns us all against disobeying God's call to duty, and at the same time it encourages us to obey our calls to duty.

[ 11 : 11 ] The source of Jonah's duty was the word of God, and that's the source of our duty too.

The book begins by saying that the word of the Lord came unto Jonah, the son of Amittai. And last week we noted that it was a great privilege for Jonah, as it is also for me and you to receive the word of God.

It is the most valuable thing that we can hold in our hand and have in our homes. The greatest deficiency that can ever be brought to any person is that he or she does not have the word of God, or does not hear the word of God.

But the word of God always comes with a command, and on this particular occasion the word of the Lord came to Jonah with a command, Arise, go to Nunavie, that great city, and cry against it, for their wickedness has come up before me.

But the word of God comes to us all with a particular command. We are commanded to repent and to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ in order to be saved.

[ 12 : 33 ] And what is important for me and you are that we examine our attitude to the word of God and what it commands us to do.

That we examine our attitude to the duty that the word of God requires of me and you, which is to repent and to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ so that we shall be saved.

And our attitude or response to the word of God always carries with it certain consequences. Well, tonight I want to say a little more about the word of God and us.

When the word of the Lord comes to anyone, it comes in a personal way to them. Here we are told that the word of the Lord came to Jonah.

And tonight the word of the Lord is coming to you. The word of the Lord singles us out. It separates us from all others.

[ 13 : 48 ] Maybe you are finding out for yourself how the word singles you out and how it sets you apart. In Jonah's case, we are told that he was commanded to go to Nineveh, that pagan city, and certainly that would not be on Jonah's schedule.

But the word of God was bringing him out of his comfort zone and turning his schedule upside down, leaving him restless and perhaps lonely as he grappled with the word that came to him.

And maybe you are like Jonah. The word of the Lord has come to you in a very personal way, bringing you out of your comfort zone and upsetting your schedule, turning your mind upside down, leaving you in a very restless position.

Up to this point, maybe you were quite comfortable to go along with the believing community and still remain in some ways attached to the unbelieving community.

It was your comfort zone. But now the word has come and commands you to come out from among them and be separate, commanding you to confess Christ, to make a public profession that you are a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ.

[ 15 : 14 ] And that makes you uncomfortable and restless because it brings you out from your comfort zone. It goes directly against your own schedule.

This is not what you had planned. Perhaps you were quite comfortably with the thought of being a secret disciple, as it were. Perhaps you had scheduled out your plans of when you would become a Christian, and the word of the Lord has come and says to you, now is the accepted time.

Now is the day of salvation. Maybe you had your own schedule of how you were going to serve the Lord, and the word has come to you in a very personal way and has totally thrown your schedule out of the window and commands you to serve in ways that you never thought.

In the Gospel of Mark, we are told about the Lord healing the man that was demon-possessed. And Mark records for us that when he was coming to the ship, that he that had been possessed with the devil prayed him, that is Jesus, that he might be with them.

Howbeit Jesus suffered him not, but saith to him, go home to thy friends and tell them how great things the Lord have done for thee, and have had compassion on thee.

[ 16 : 52 ] And he departed and began to publish in Decapolis how great things Jesus had done for him, and all men did marvel. You see, this is evidence of a renewed soul wanting to be as close to Jesus as he can possibly be.

Is that not a Christian's hope and expectation that he waits for with great anticipation to be with Jesus? However, in our pilgrimage journey towards that goal, we ought to seek to be as close to Jesus as we can.

And you may ask, well, how? Well, we can be close to Jesus in prayer, in fellowship with his people, in his word. But there is another aspect to following Jesus, and that is the aspect of witness and serving the Lord.

And you know, that aspect of following Jesus, of witness and serving the Lord, can bring us out of our comfort zones. Jesus gave this man that was demon-possessed, he gave him a most difficult mission to go and witness among his own people.

And sometimes Jesus gives to me and you a most difficult mission to go and witness among the people who have rejected him. He says, go home to your family, go home to your neighbours, go home to your friends, go home to your workplaces, go into the world, where there is so much unbelief and criticism and mockery and fondness made of the gospel.

[ 18 : 39 ] And in these places, witness for me. Perhaps the Lord had greatly blessed you with temporal things of this life, and now he commands you to serve him, to be a witness for him in a world that is hostile of the things of God.

Maybe you fear marriage hostility, maybe you fear family hostility, or you may fear hostility at your workplace. Well, the word of God and serving God always brings us out of our comfort zones.

And this is also true of this man, Jonah. The command for Jonah was certainly great. Nineveh of all places, he probably thought. But the word of the Lord was bringing him out of his comfort zone.

He was being asked to do and to serve the Lord in a way that he never thought of. Going to that pagan city of Nineveh, going to those who were the enemies of Israel, going to those who were the enemies of God, going to those who were steeped in idolatry.

But what was Jonah's response? Well, that is what we want really to focus upon as we find it in verse 3.

[ 20 : 21 ] But Jonah rose up to flee into Tarshish from the presence of the Lord and went down to Joppa and he found a ship going to Tarshish.

So he paid the fare off and went down into it to go with them into Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. He chose to ignore God's command and instead he headed in the opposite direction.

Tarshish. Tarshish was most likely located in what is now the nation of Spain. Nineveh was east and Tarshish was west.

Oh, how many of us went the opposite way when the word of the Lord began to leave us restless and uncomfortable, when it began to convict us and stab our consciences.

How many of us heard the gospel and rejected it? But we find these words perhaps the saddest words in the whole narrative that we have in this book.

[ 21 : 33 ] But Jonah rose up to flee. God told him to do one thing but alas, Jonah had other thoughts and maybe that is true.

The word of the Lord is telling you to do one thing, repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ but you have other thoughts. Despite the fact that Jonah was given the word of the Lord, despite the fact that God came to Jonah in such an intimate way, we are told that Jonah wanted to do other things.

Well, that may be a picture of yourself today. Maybe the Lord through his word has come to you in a very intimate way, commanding you to repent and believe, to become a witness for him in this hostile world and you respond by saying, I can't do it.

Or maybe you're saying, it's too big for me or it's too great. That step would be a giant step and I am not able to do it.

I am afraid. I cannot take that step. I cannot go in that direction. And just like Jonah, you may run away from the word of the Lord.

[ 22 : 58 ] There are many reasons and opinions given why Jonah ran in that direction. There could have been the thought that the Gentiles were outside the sphere of salvation, that salvation was only for the Jews.

But here we have a reminder that we must never put anyone outside the sphere of salvation. The person in the gutter, the beggar on the street, the person on the throne, we are all in need of God's salvation.

However, I think the root reason was actually unbelief. Jonah doubted God's word that there could be salvation for the Gentiles.

If Jonah had been fully persuaded of God's words, he would have obeyed. Full persuasion always results in obedience.

Sadly, it is because you are not fully persuaded tonight that you continue in the path of rejection and disobedience. for the believer, the word commands us to witness for Christ in a hostile world.

[ 24 : 21 ] I know that we must keep ourselves and sport it from the world and not conform to their ways, but do I use that as an excuse to run in the opposite direction for not speaking to them about their soul and their need of salvation?

There is a world out there of a people who are in a physical and spiritual need. Are we too afraid to interact with them in the fear of receiving social stigma?

The alcoholic, the drug addict, the homeless is out there. Is it just too inconvenient or simply too costly on our time and energy to help them and have a word to them about their soul?

Or shall we be like Jonah and just run away? You see, Jonah was given the opportunity that many of us will never have to preach to thousands and to win thousands to the Lord Jesus Christ.

but sadly, we read that Jonah rose up to flee into Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. Jonah deliberately and willfully decided to go in the opposite direction.

[ 25 : 50 ] The action of Jonah in verse 3 moves so quickly it almost leaves a person breathless. Notice it.

Jonah rises up to flee, then he is in Joppa, then he finds a ship, then he pays the fare to travel on the ship, then he is down in the ship. Everything happens so quickly.

We may ask, how could this happen so quickly? Or perhaps, we may ask, did it happen so quickly? It is quite possible that in Jonah's case that his spiritual health had been decaying for some time prior to the word of the Lord coming to him.

And that can happen to me and you as well. Jonah was being conditioned for his greatest obedience by inward spiritual decline.

We may think all this happened very quickly but did it really? Was there a spiritual decline in the life of Jonah before the word of the Lord came to him?

[ 27 : 08 ] That is why we must keep a constant discipline upon our lives. That is why we must examine ourselves and ask ourselves are there places where we are slipping?

Where we are losing ground? Are we neglecting the Bible? Are we neglecting God's word? Are we neglecting prayer? Are worldly habits creeping in and bending our wheels in the wrong direction?

If our spiritual life is corroding then it is much easier for us to go in the path of disobedience and maybe here in this present setting that is brought before us in the life of Jonah that it wasn't something that happened suddenly but it was something that had been going on for some time and now has climaxed as it were in his disobedience.

Twice we are told in verse 3 that Jonah sought to flee from the presence of the Lord. We may be tempted to think that Jonah foolishly believed that by putting physical distance between himself and Israel that he was escaping God's actual presence.

in one sense it is impossible to get away from the presence of God for he is omnipresent. God is omnipresent and Jonah was a prophet of God.

[ 28 : 48 ] It is hard to believe that he knew so little about God to think him limited by space. After all he would have known Psalm 139 that we read and hear and heard these words whether shall I go from thy spirit or whether shall I fly from thy presence.

If I ascend 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 thine 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 side is not from thee but the night shineth as the day the darkness and the light are both alike to thee but the expression from the presence of the Lord in verse 3 is not a reference to the omnipresent attribute of God for God is everywhere but other passages in the Bible show us how the expression can refer to a number of things other than God's omnipresent for instance this expression away from the presence of the Lord is said of Cain in Genesis 4 verse 16 there we read and

Cain went out from the presence of the Lord and dwelt in the land of Nod on the east of Eden in this case I think that it's very probable that Adam and family worshipped at the place where the cherry beams had kept the way into the garden was situated that there they served and worshipped the Lord but Cain decided to turn his back upon that place and he went into the land of Nod in other words he refused to serve the Lord in Jeremiah 23 and verse 39 we read of God saying to disobedient Israel therefore behold I even I will utterly forget you and I will forsake you and the city that I gave you and your fathers and cast you out of my presence obviously this does not mean that

God would no longer be omnipresent what it did mean is that Israel was going to be separated from some of its spiritual privileges for example we know that the temple was going to be destroyed in Luke chapter 1 verse 9 the angel Gabriel said to Zacharias I am Gabriel that stands in the presence of God and there the expression presence of God means serving God when Elijah spoke to Ahab about the coming drought he spoke of the Lord God before whom I stand meaning that he was serving God so from these scriptures we learn that the expression presence of the Lord does not always refer to the omnipresent attribute of God that it can refer to such things as the place of worship and of serving

God so when we read that Jonah rose to flee into Tarshish from the presence of the Lord it means that he was moving away from the place of serving God and he found a ship going to

[ 33 : 29 ] Tarshish so he paid the fare thereof and went down to go with them and to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord the frightening thing is that Jonah felt that he had confirmation in his disobedience Jonah determined to go in the opposite direction and to go to Tarshish he found a ship that was going to Tarshish and it would sound like his plan was successful he probably convinced himself that he must be doing the right thing it is like the woman in the garden of Eden after she succumbed to doubt the word of God she looked at the fruit and she saw that it was good for food and I suspect that by the time she took of the fruit she was convinced she was doing the right thing you see when you are living in disobedience to God's commandment you will find at times as if providence is there to confirm you in that disobedience and that is what is frightening you can find confirmation for the things you want to believe and convince yourself that you are doing the right thing he may well have reasoned that if his course were wrong then God would place an obstacle in his path but the case was the opposite for

Jonah and Joppa and it is a stark reminder for us that we can be misguided by circumstances The Catechism asks, what role hath God given to directors how we may glorify and enjoy him?

And the answer is, the word of God, which is contained in the scriptures of the Old and New Testament, is the only role to directors how we may glorify and enjoy him.

Then it asks, what do the scriptures, Prince Barry, teach? And the answer is, the scriptures principle, it teach what man is to believe concerning God and what duty God requires of man.

It is not circumstances that is to guide us, but the word of God. Now here we see how easy the path of disobedience appeared, at least at first.

[ 36 : 06 ] Jonah went down to Joppa and what did he find on his arrival there but a ship going to Tarshish. There was room for him on the ship. He was able to pay the fare.

Surely that is a reminder to us that circumstances alone do not prove God's blessing. The confirmation we always need is the word of God.

Another interesting thing here is the number of times that we find Jonah and his movement was downward.

Each step that Jonah took was a going down. He went down to Joppa. He went down into it, that is, into the ship.

But Jonah was gone down into the sides of the ship and he lay and he was fast asleep. And then in chapter 2 and verse 3 we read, For thou hadst cast me into the deep in the midst of the seas and the floods compassed me about.

[ 37 : 14 ] All thy billows and thy waves passed over me. You see, it is a reminder to us, is it not, that the way of rebellion is always a way that takes you down and further away from God.

It seems that just about each step that Jonah took when he began his disobedience course was a step down in a physical sense. Now, it's not necessarily wrong to go down physically, but very often when the Bible focuses attention on a physical descent, it carries with it a spiritual lesson.

In other words, Jonah's physical going down or descent spoke of his spiritual descent, his spiritual going down. Jonah, as we see here, went from being God's spokesperson to being rebuked by a heathen shipmaster.

Jonah went down continually. It is a reminder to us that once you start sinning, it is much easier to sin yet more and more.

Once you become disobedient to God's word, it is much easier to continue in that path of disobedience.

[ 38 : 34 ] Once Jonah got on the sinful slide downward, he kept going down, down, down. It's a strong warning to us all.

For once we allow ourselves to be captivated by one sin, it always craves for more and more and more.

Ask the alcoholic about his first drink. Ask the person whose life is thrown by drugs about the first time that person tried drugs. And the evidence is that it led to more and more until their lives were ruined.

Many intend to do something only once. Just take a drink. Just try a drug. And the evidence is that they continually fall into the habit.

Once you begin, it is always dangerous because it will always be a continual falling down.

[ 39 : 42 ] We see that once people begin skipping church and that it is much easier to continue skipping church. Once a person commits any sin, the second time it's easier.

And what we do find is that church attendance is going. People become enslaved to whatever particular sin that has captivated their heart. You see, it is a stark reminder to us that once we start sinning, it is much easier to sin yet more and more.

Once we start not performing our duty, then it is much easier to go on not performing our duty. But we must not stay negative there.

There is a positive side to all this. The good news of the gospel. The good news of the grace and mercy of God. That can lead a person from being enslaved to any particular sin and path of disobedience, I should rather say.



It can bring us back to where we ought to be. The question facing each one of us is whether we are willing to obey God's will as it is made known to us.

[ 41 : 14 ] Perhaps we have gone astray, but by God's intervening grace, he has made us know our need to repent and to return to him. And the question is, are we willing to return?

Are we willing to come to God, confessing our sins and seeking power for a new obedience? Let Jonah be a warning to us.

It's a warning for us all. It's a warning for me and it's a warning for you. But are we willing to come to God, confessing your sins and seeking that power for new obedience?

Oh, how we must examine ourselves. As we already noted. How spiritual decline can come into our lives.

And how it can lead to open disobedience. As happened here. In the life of a servant of the Lord.

[ 42 : 31 ] But it is a warning to us all. Because what are we doing with the duty that God requires of us?

To repent and to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. To be a witness for him. To serve him.

May the Lord bless our thoughts. Let us pray. Eternal and ever-blessed Lord. We pray that as we study thy word.

And as we see the examples that are brought before us in thy word. Examples to warn us.

And examples that we should take to our heart and be warned by them. So we pray, O Lord, that we may indeed be able, through thy grace, to fulfil thy call to us.

[ 43 : 34 ] So that duty that we all have to repent and to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Of that duty to examine ourselves.

That we are not in a spiritual decline. Which makes it easier for us to be disobedient to that duty that thou dost require of us.

O Lord, we pray that thou would lay thy word upon our heart. That thou would continue with us in the coming week. We pray, O Lord, that as we come before thee.

That we would come in true humility of mind, of spirit and heart. And confess our sins and seek that cleansing which can only come from thee.

O Lord, that thou would forgive us for all our sins and for all our shortcomings. And now may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God.

[ 44 : 38 ] And the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Now and forevermore. Amen.