

Jonah's Flight The Character of Backsliding and Rebellion

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[0 : 00] How obedient are you to God? To what extent do you seek to do His will in your life?

Or perhaps better, in all of your life, not just some parts. Being that you are here, knowing most of your hearts as I do, I know that you are saved in Christ, long to do His will, desire to seek to glorify Him in what you do.

But perhaps you're doing that, still reserving a closet, if you will, that, Lord, I really don't need you to touch this.

This is mine. This is what I hold on to. Do you quench, perhaps, the Spirit's leading, pointing out to you that this is also His?

Do you surrender all to our God? For those that weren't here last week, we began a sermon series going through this jewel of the Old Testament.

[1 : 13] And we found, in just the first two verses, that God gave a clear word to Jonah. He gave it in such a way that He had heard before.

He was a prophet. He knew the call of God. He knew what it was to call out against a people with that word of God. We saw, in looking at the sister passage in 2 Kings, that He was the prophet of the northern kingdom in Samaria, and the borders under the reign of King Jeroboam II were expanded and restored under the preaching of Jonah.

So Jonah knew what it was to receive the word of the Lord and to obey it. Many things were done that weren't recorded in that short narrative of 2 Kings that Samaria was strengthened, despite an evil king, and even an evil people, whose heart was wandering in the same way it sounds like the king's was.

So if I were to ask the questions I asked you moments ago to Jonah, he would say, yes, in a normal way of life, I do obey the Lord.

I surrender to the Lord. And then he got this command. Jonah was on the right and faithful side of the equation when it comes to, are you a follower of God?

[2 : 49] Are you a Christian, essentially? He preached the word. He knew the word. And yet, he turns from the Lord.

He says, but, no. But God turned his heart to him, or was trying to turn his heart to him, but our narrative starts with, but Jonah rose against.

So we're going to divide our time this morning in two ways. We're starting in verse 3 with the great rebellion and backsliding of Jonah that starts, but Jonah rose to flee.

And then we're going to finish it by looking at verse, the beginning of verse 4 and the character behind verse 4, which is, but God hurled.

And it's the first signpost, you might say, of this book, of the God of grace that will be there.

[3 : 56] Every time Jonah has a but, God comes with another answer. God comes with the stronger answer. So we have the character of rebellion and backsliding.

And then the character of our God. But Jonah. This but Jonah is unique. We don't have any prophet given a command like Jonah is given, and to have the prophet immediately turn and say, no.

Essentially. That is what we have in very bold form, if you will. He's given in a command. And if we look, if you skip down to chapter 4 in verse 2, we have the great why that we will unpack later in this summer.

But I want you to notice one thing. You know, the narrative that we have before us says, 1 to 2, Jonah received the word of the Lord, and then we get to verse 3, and Jonah arose.

And there's no discussion in there. We don't have the narrative that describes any conversation between the prophet and his God. Actually, we have a lot more of that with difficult commands from other prophets where there's a bit of back and forth and like, Lord, what do you mean by this?

[5 : 25] But Jonah 4 too has an interesting phrase that I want us to look at. It says, he prayed to the Lord and said, O Lord, is this not what I said when I was yet in my country?

Which is where he is now. He's still in his country. That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish. And then he goes on to talk about he didn't want them to be redeemed. We'll get into his racism at the end of the summer.

That's really the heart of his rebellion. We're just going to deal with the character of rebellion today and see what it has for us in our own lives. But it's clear that there's some dialogue or at least one way, maybe it was a monologue, as Jonah is rising to flee, there's something that he's saying to the Lord here that is, is this not what I told you?

That I know you're a God of great redemption? He's saying this in some form as he's running away. from God.

So, what I want to do today as we unpack this is to give you marks of backsliding and rebellion.

[6 : 40] What are three marks? You have a handout. I'm learning a little. Last week, there was more than one that said, Don, I appreciated the message.

There were a lot of references and I would like to have some of those references. You went kind of fast through some of those references. So, your handout this morning has lots of the outline with lots of the answers for you and lots of those references.

So, I don't, it's wonderful to have page turning and I want you to be able to do that but I also want you to get the reference if you don't want to turn now but save it for later.

So, I'm trying to include more of that. You know, you guys are familiar with Bill. He gives you the handout in the bulletin which is great which usually has blanks to fill in but then he always leaves for some of you, you know, in the foyer he has a handout that's basically his notes.

It's everything. It's everything kind of filled out and it's usually so hard. I mean, I love it and Dawn loves it. She picks it up every time and helps her follow through the service. I am kind of in between.

[7 : 45] Like, I've got some answers. It's not quite as detailed is what Bill gives you but I'm learning. What are the marks of Christian backsliding? What does it look like in our lives and that we can actually see some of those marks in Jonah's life that is that turning away when we get a clear word from God?

The first is we turn from the Word. Jonah has a clear word from the Lord. Our first mark is refusing to obey a clear word from the Lord.

When we look at it, when we think about it, when we consider the Lord working in our lives, most of the time we know what we don't want to do that He's told us what to do.

Most of the time we find that place in Scripture where we go, God, this is a difficult one. Oh, is it really that difficult to understand? We kind of say it is but really what we're trying to do is we're trying to say, I don't want you to touch this.

As I mentioned, this clear word from Jonah was boilerplate. It was something that he knew. He knew what this looked like. He would have received similar commands for Israel's benefit to preach against, to preach to the Samaritan Israelites of the day.

[9 : 13] That if you don't repent, the Lord will judge you. The Lord is bringing His word. The Lord is the great and mighty King. But this command, he didn't want to obey.

Not only did he not, did he understand, he had the clear word but he didn't want to obey it because he knew what it meant. He knew what it meant with regards to Jonah.

He knew it was a word of grace even though it had judgment as its main message. It was difficult to receive this command.

Sorry, Nineveh was 500 miles or so to the northeast of where he would have been in the middle of Samaria.

Whether it was Shechem or somewhere else in the north in the Galilee region. It would have taken by caravan two to three months to get there. They wouldn't have gone direct.

[10 : 20] They would have probably gone up and gone through Damascus more northerly before crossing over into Nineveh. And there would have been mountains. some days they might have been able to cover up to 10 to 15 miles a journey through the mountains maybe less.

But scholars estimate that it could have been as much as three months journey. And it would have been through lands where they didn't know God.

And they didn't love Israel. If you recall we talked last week that Israel's borders were secure which meant Assyria's borders were not.

So he might have met resistance. So there was some difficulty in the command. It was also unique for a prophet to be called to go to a foreign land.

This didn't happen. Yes Isaiah was given a great vision of God. and Elijah was told to preach not only against King Ahab who should have been a king of the north that honored the Lord but Jezebel wasn't.

[11 : 36] So there were some pagans that the prophets had to interact with over the time. But never was it go to that pagan country. Become a missionary.

Don't just be a church pastor in your fun little church that you like to preach in. Go cross the borders. So it was difficult but nonetheless it was a clear word.

He wasn't given a vision like Isaiah was. This great and mighty vision of God in his enthroned temple. Or there was, you know, Jeremiah had a lot of discussion.

There was a lot of back and forth. Moses even would advocate before the Lord, Lord, you should go with us. Your presence should go with us.

Don't just give us our country. We need you. So there were some interactions the prophets would have with God. Well, something in Jonah caused him to speak back to God but it was a very clear embodiment of no, I'm not going.

[12 : 45] And no matter how much difficulty Jonah might have had with the command in all of the circumstances, it didn't matter how difficult it was.

He was a prophet. You do what's difficult. You do what's hard. This message wasn't for the Jews to repent. It was for a foreign nation to repent.

But regardless of his rationalization and reason, he disagreed with the plan. The second mark is that when we rebel, we not only rebel against the word of the Lord, we rebel and flee the presence of the Lord.

That phrase is used three times in our narrative. That phrase poetically is intentionally set apart in the way the Hebrew poetry reads for us to make a very clear attention, to pay clear attention to he was fleeing from the presence of the Lord.

Presence can be translated presence. It can also be translated seeing the face of God. We know much about the presence and the face of God in the Old Testament.

[14 : 06] presence. The presence of God was first something that you actually couldn't flee from.

James led us in Psalm 139 this morning. In the middle of 139 is that wonderful phrase that we like to see. We as Christians in our right minds love to see where can I go from your presence oh Lord.

I can't and that's a glorious thing. We also know the presence of the Lord even though well let me back up.

One of the questions that came up today wouldn't Jonah have known that he couldn't flee the presence of the Lord. Wouldn't he have known Psalm 139? Yes.

But sin makes us act contrary to the theology that we know. Sin causes us to do what we know we shouldn't do.

[15 : 22] We know that two plus two is four and sin makes it five. I mentioned I think I've mentioned it before it's one of my favorite pictures from Narnia in the silver chair when the clear word of the Lord is given to the kids or actually only one of the kids because they already disobeyed and one of them fell off the cliff or the mountaintop clear instruction to Jill when the air is clear before the Lord but he says Athlon says you will go into Narnia and it will be cloudy and you will have a hard time remembering the words that I give you if you don't memorize them now when you get there you will have a hard time following you won't remember it will be cloudy when we are in when we let our flesh!

and not the spirit lead us our theology we don't even believe what the second mark or I should say the second aspect of the presence of the Lord that we see not only can you not flee from it it is terrible it is awesome and it's not awesome like dude that's awesome it's awesome in it's awesome it is awe inspiring it is terrible it is at the same time Israel in the south Judah is given the word to Isaiah where Isaiah 6 I stood before the Lord in the throne and his train filled the temple and he was speechless and he was he was woe is me I am undone that is what we see with the presence of the

Lord in the Old Testament as well we see much of this we see Jeremiah 5 22 do you not fear me declares the Lord do you not tremble before me I place the sand as a boundary for the sea a perpetual barrier that it cannot pass though the waves toss though they prevail though they roar they cannot pass the creation has this awesome respect for the fear of the Lord isn't that interesting the creation the waters know right but man also understands Job 23 15 therefore I am terrified at his presence when I consider I am in dread of him Job we believe was written as one of the earliest there's a good chance

Jonah knew what was written for Job as well Jonah also knew and demonstrated how a sinful rebellious creature cannot stand before the creator Job 13 16 says this will be my salvation that the godless cannot come before him if you are sinful and rebellious you cannot stand before the Lord you have a couple options you either flee or you're consumed Adam and Eve hid did they really hide he just created that bush but again our theology doesn't matter when we're running from the Lord our theology just kind of we just push it off like it doesn't exist where are you

Adam he knew where he knew where he was he knew where she was or if you stay and you stay as a sinful rebellious sinner you are consumed Leviticus 10 made Abed and Bayou decided to offer strange fire before the Lord and then a different fire came down and consumed them that is the character of our God because he cannot stand sin in his presence the third mark is that you typically physically manifest your spiritual rebellion in some form there is an interesting parallelism that goes on in our passage Jonah went down to Joppa and he went down into the ship and he went down into the inner part of the ship and he laid down and was fast asleep we do little little geography in our class this morning and we talked about

[20 : 42] I'll use I'll go from the left to the right sea right the coastline Mediterranean and the land right on the edge Israel and you had Shechem which was probably one of the highest points in the north probably where Jonah ended up as the prophet to the king of the north in Shechem about 1700 feet above sea level Joppa would have been at sea level now it doesn't mean anytime you go fishing you're fleeing from the Lord don't get me wrong the point is you're going down to get to Joppa but the down doesn't stop and it's intentional poetic Hebrew that tells us he's going down and down and down the other physical manifestation we typically see from somebody that's running from the Lord is we flee into the darkness we go where the light isn't sins are normally committed at night sins are usually committed even though with the pagans there's a godlessness to them but there's something in them that says

I'm not doing this where everybody can see it where there's shame there's typically a physical manifestation of what we do and the downward path we know we haven't even touched how far low Jonah is going to go he's going down into the sea is it interesting we found we talked this morning that the mariners were throwing cargo off the ship so it would lighten we have heathens on board that are crying out to their god in the midst of the storm Jonah is going the opposite direction and he knows what he's doing he knows what he's doing he actually later when we get next week we're going to talk the rest of chapter one is this amazing dialogue of Jonah running from God and still preaching truth and saying accurately exactly what he's doing and the pagans are the ones that are being rescued while he continues his downward descent it's an amazing narrative it's a paradox before us in

God's economy rebellion causes shame and we run and we flee and we go into the darkness the darkest place probably on earth is probably the belly of a fish at the bottom of an ocean lake of some kind that's pretty dark and that's about as far as you can physically get if we're talking about an altitude and we lift up our hands to praise the Lord up light in the presence of the king is always honored right is always the path of righteousness he's going the opposite way let me state that a prophet fleeing the presence or face of God in disobedience may have been the closest parallel to a servant of a king that would flee the presence of a king without being asked to you guys remember the account of

Nehemiah Nehemiah's countenance fell before the king when he was concerned about Jerusalem's walls and the king asked what's up and Nehemiah feared for his life and he prayed that arrow prayer in the midst of a struggle which we can do we have a God that hears those because he knew his countenance fell his head could have been on a platter if his countenance fell before the king that's the kind of respect you have before a king you're there you're facing him and you're happy that you're facing him and you're willing to do his bidding remember Esther was even fearful of going into the presence of the king without being asked to if he didn't extend his scepter in favor she could have lost her head the prophet stood in the presence of the king if you will of the lord or favor of the lord and turned his back on the king in his throne room we talked about the image the story that came to mind was gladiator when

Commodus the wicked emperor finally got a hold and wanted to meet this gladiator that was because his nephew said he's a hero I want to see him and the emperor wants to see you gladiator and he had his helmet on because he was trying to kind of conceal his identity because he was going to get revenge and the emperor says why don't you remove your helmet and tell us who you are gladiator and he turns his back and says my name is gladiator now we know the end of the story he he he he was the hero in that and the emperor was wicked but the emperor said how dare you turn your back on me that was a punishable offense in fact in that movie they all drew swords the soldiers around the gladiators drew swords to strike him down right then Jonah turned from the Lord he turned from his presence he deserved death from disobeying his God we all deserve death and punishment because of our disobedience and sin and it's sin that we know he knew he was sinning we know when we sin before I get into the the great but God that redeems us

[26 : 51] I want to I want to finish this thought by saying there's a difference between backsliding and rebellion well let me just say we like to think that there's a difference between backsliding and rebellion that we can somehow turn it off when it gets to be too bad the nature of sin is is is is we it's it's the proverbs 30 20 that the adulteress wipes with their mouth and says I've done no evil as if oh I didn't do it and I I can or the addict that says I can stop at any time oh I can turn back to God whenever I want to can you really the external view of somebody rebelling outwardly against the word of God and our small steps of backsliding are the exact same thing they're the same steps they're the same turning and you cannot distinguish them and you do not have as much power as you think you do to just turn it off whenever you want it's the reason

Hebrews tells us as much as it does when you've tasted of the Lord and you turn how great is it to be redeemed from that sin is sin the nature of sin is turning from God in any form we may not be shaking our fist at him in some outward way but when we turn and we know what we're doing we're doing that we're rebelling none is righteous no not one we know we can't be perfect don't get me wrong okay I while I'm saying that when we outwardly sin and rebel against God what I'm not saying is be perfect because you know you have the ability to be a perfect obedient Christian shorter catechism 85 which I know Diane will eventually get to is any man able to perfectly keep the commandment of

God no mere man since the fall is able in this life perfectly to keep the commandments of God but daily breaks them in thought word and deed folks we're not talking about our sins and our missteps that we know our flesh when you read Romans 7 and say Lord I did what I willed not to do that's not what we're talking about we're talking about the area of your life that you know you don't want God to touch and you know what he's telling you to do but God hurled the storm but God describes the character of a faithful forgiving father if our life is marked by anything it is marked by despite our sin the great but

God in our life the Hebrew is literally God threw the wind or the storm it felt terrible it was awe inspiring it caused knees to shake literally they were probably shaking in that boat as they were trying to throw the stores off of it but God would have had every right not to intervene God would have had every right to let his presence be left and we would have had a very short book with very little message for us that is a sign that even Christ of the New Testament points out is a key sign the redemption of God despite the sin is a key message the but

God is throughout scripture though this is not a new concept even in this passage Genesis 8 1 but God remembered Noah and all the beasts and all the livestock that were with him in the ark and the flood subsided when Laban was angry at Jacob for leaving Genesis 31 29 it is in my power to do you harm Laban said but the God of your father spoke to me in a vision the night before and I will spare you because God spoke to me Laban had every right to take him out when Israel needed the law given a second time in Deuteronomy because of their rebellion verse 20 of Deuteronomy 4 but the Lord has taken you and brought you out of the iron furnace and out of Egypt to be a people of his own inheritance as you are this day

[32 : 21] Gideon when the angel of the Lord appeared to him in Judges 6 Alas O Lord God for now I have seen the angel of the Lord face to face that presence is there but the Lord said to him peace be to you do not fear you shall not die there's a but God that causes any of us to be able to stand before God just to do that as a sinful being there's a but God and we know the but God is but Christ standing before us New Testament unrepentant sinners we know this now the great but gods in two great passages Romans 5 and Ephesians 2 Romans 5 7 to 8 for for one will scarcely die for a righteous person though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die not that anyone is good but

God verse 8 shows his love for us that while we were still sinners Christ died for us and then Ephesians 2 3 through 5 and we were by nature children of wrath like the rest of mankind but God verse 4 being rich in mercy because of the great love which with he has loved us even when we were dead in our trespasses and sins even when we were at the bottom of the ocean in the belly of the fish made us alive together with Christ by grace you have been saved we don't see the fullness of God's redemption for Jonah yet that comes later in fact it comes later in his obedience to God to finally do the commission we don't ever see his full redemption of spirit and countenance in the entire book again there's a warning for us there there's times that

God sends a storm or a still small voice and so we see the first but God here we see the first God hurling the storm as an act of grace even though it's terrible this is the character of our father it's father's day any time we open the word of the Lord on Sunday it's heavenly father's day so my sermon isn't about father's day but it is and it always is not us in fleshly father form his fatherhood his fatherhood the second point on the but God is that there is also despite the terribleness of the presence of the Lord for his people there is a glory and joy in the presence of the

Lord when we have the sin and rebellion taken care of and covered there is great joy in his presence as terrible as he is he's our father that's the word he gives!

father psalm 16 1 says it's a place of joy you make known to me the path of life in your presence there is fullness of joy at your right hand are pleasures forever more taste and see that the Lord is good psalm 34 that's a bonus it's not on your sheet the second one is the presence of the Lord becomes our dwelling place it's not just where we come for a little bit of time it should be there where we are all the time we know we can't all the time but that's our that's always our ambition is to seek his favor psalm 140 13 again Jonah would have known these psalms likely surely!

[36 : 47] the righteous shall give thanks to your name the upright upright not downtrodden dwell in your presence it is a place of refreshment Acts 3 Acts 3 we have the second sermon we have Pentecost the Christ that you crucified what shall we do repent and believe thousands saved spirit came out thousands saved the second sermon was at the portico Solomon's portico similar sermon similar sermon of you did this you killed him very very parallel to the to the Pentecost sermon repent therefore Acts 3 19 and turn back that your sins may be blotted out that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord that he may send the

Christ appointed for you Jesus whom heaven must receive until the time for restoring all things about which God spoke by the mouth of the holy prophets long ago like this one times of refreshing through Christ the only way we can have times of refreshing and joy and fullness and dwell is because Christ is covering for us it is a place you love to hear the word to stand before the king Acts 10 32 to 33 send therefore to Joppa this is this is Peter in Acts here Acts 10 send therefore to Joppa and ask for Simon who is called Peter he is lodging in the house of Simon the tanner by the sea we know Joppa is by the sea he didn't need to tell us that so I sent for you at once and you have been kind enough to come now therefore we are all here these are the Gentiles by the way that are finally the purpose of the vision and the sheet and going

Peter going and coming back and the centurion was all to get to this point to get all of these Gentile believers in one room for this we are here in the presence of God to hear all that you have commanded by the Lord when we're in the presence of God in our right minds redeemed with the covering of Christ we love to hear his word this is the same Joppa that a Gentile nation was already in the crosshairs of God to save and it was at this Joppa that a prophet went the other way because I don't want them to be saved so Joppa has had a flip from the old to the new my last point is that the last part of the second point is that we have great help for difficult commands of God

Psalm 42 5 this should also maybe be in your outline why are you in despair oh my soul and why have you become disturbed within me soul why are you disturbed have this conversation when you see the flesh resisting God hope in God for I shall again praise him for the help of his presence his presence becomes our help and guess what with the Holy Spirit in our hearts we have the first of wonderful blessings to help us never to flee from his presence so the complete word of God one is there to help you I have the first Corinthians 10 12 to 14 passage therefore let anyone that thinks he stands take heed lest he fall no temptation is overtaking you that is not common to man God is faithful and will not allow you to be tempted beyond which you are able when we have a difficult command of

God and our flesh resists it and we know it's sin that's causing us to resist don't allow the temptation to overtake you the word says it doesn't have to you have an out you have an escape you have an escape to finally get to the Nineveh of your life that he's calling you to pray to him don't just do what Jonah did where he was saying some things to God on his way to still being rebellious right the teenager that grumbles like okay I'm gonna go obey you know Jonah is kind of doing the teenager rebellion and goes to plead to Nineveh even at the end he still cut the gritting of the teeth I can't be that I'm preaching to myself too one you have the complete word of God to help you two prayer is there to help you again don't just say something to God seek his response he's there to help when Moses interceded he said

[42 : 06] Lord help me understand what this is this is a difficult thing you're doing Psalm 51 we know Psalm 51 was written by David after he realized what he did with Bathsheba it was his great prayer of penitence of repentance in the middle of this prayer created me a clean heart oh God and renew a right spirit within me turn my spirit right cast me not away from your presence and take not your Holy Spirit for me that's not a problem for us we know it's here forever it's in our hearts it came and went in the Old Testament it's in our hearts now restore to me the joy of your salvation and renew a right spirit within me three we know that both Christ not only is the spirit in us but both Christ and the spirit intercede for us think about that!

But He holds His priesthood permanently this is Hebrews 7 24 because He continues forever verse 25 watch this consequently He is able to save to the uttermost those that drew near to God through Him since He always lives to make intercession for them our Savior is our judge is our creator and He is the one pleading our case and pleading to God for us as our advocate He's there to help you and the spirit we know often we'd love to run to Romans 8 28 all things work together for the good yay I'm just going to let things all work together for good 26 and 27 before that likewise the spirit helps us in our weakness for we do not know what to pray as we ought we said to pray sometimes we don't know what to pray don't worry the spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words he who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the spirit is because the spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will god our guarantee our down payment which is the spirit given to us to get us through sanctification this world we live in better remember that he's in our heart instead of

Jesus being right next to us that's what Jesus taught because it won't leave last we have the church body to help us on this journey Hebrews 10 you know the passage well let us consider how to stir one another up with love and good works not neglecting to meet together as is the habit of some I'm going to end with a story of the hymn writer of the last hymn we're going to sing many of you know this story Robert Robinson 18th century England teenager in the 18th century realizing he was living a sinful teenage destructive life in a street world decided to go hear the famous preacher George Whitfield preached on the text oh generation of vipers who has warned you to flee from the wrath to come

John the Baptist Robert left in dread under a deep sense of sin that lasted at least three years and at age 20 made peace with God sent out to become a preacher himself and he wrote a couple years later come thou found words that end with the last verse that you know well prone to wander Lord I feel it prone to leave the God I love here's my heart oh take and seal it seal it for like courts above and he almost as if he knew that he needed his heart sealed in some hermetic way that didn't let him sin anymore well there's an unconfirmed story of him years later having wandered from the Lord in a carriage with a woman who was humming the words and saying the words of his hymn and supposedly he says madam and she said have you heard this before and he said madam

I am the poor unhappy man who wrote that hymn many years ago and I would give a thousand worlds if I had them to enjoy the feelings that I had them like Jonah possibly and possibly like Robert Robinson we are prone to wander and we need to know that the Lord is there and has given us so much to help us on our journey to keep us from fleeing from his presence when you feel the wander turn to the Lord pray to him let's pray now gracious Lord we are struck by your grace we are struck by your patience and forbearance with this prophet who would thumb his nose and almost shake his fist to say

[48 : 05] I would not do it and yet your grace bears with this man your patience and long suffering are amazing Lord your grace Lord is amazing God would you be that God to us today we know you are Lord help us to have our theology that we know come to bear by your spirit at the times of weakness that we know we have do it by your grace and through through and under the name of your son amen yeah please stand I want to stand