

Bible Verse: Jonah 1:1-3
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It is a question that is often asked when the latest news of failure comes to the consciousness of the evangelical world, when the latest pastor, the latest celebrity spokesman for God has once again disqualified himself from ministry by way of moral failure or scandal or of theological aberration, and the question is often asked, I know in the early days of our lives Nancy would ask this question to me when we would see these things happen: how could a pastor do that? How could a pastor fail like that when he studies and teaches the Bible for a living? How could it be that he ever gets to this point? How could he fall as so many do? There are so many things that we could say about that and I'm not going to go into half of what's on my mind to say, but the tragic thing these days is not that it happens when those episodes are brought to light, the tragic thing is that we've come to expect that from spiritual men in positions of spiritual leadership. We're no longer shocked by it. What we're shocked by is a man who actually perseveres in ministry to the end without that disqualifying disfigurement of his ministry and of his life, and more importantly, the shame that he brings on the Lord Jesus Christ through his failure.

These things are true, aren't they? We don't even have to belabor the point to equip you and to acquaint you with what the thought is, but what I want you to think about today is this, is that ultimately this is not a new problem in the sense that men of God failing in their responsibilities, so-called men of God shocking us with their sin, and also I want you to realize, to think about lest we just view this, lest you just view this as something out there about them and not about you, to realize that this is a problem that is not unique to pastors either, is it? It's a sin problem. It's a sin problem and sin is a universal phenomenon, it is a universal disfigurement on all of the human race and it is a problem that still infects our hearts even as believers in Jesus Christ. There is a lot that I want to say about this today, so much so that I left my watch and my phone clock on the front row. This may go a while so get comfortable. I say that in sympathy as well as in love, but also in truth.

There were men who were very influential in my theological training of whom this proved to be true. This is deeply close and deeply personal to me going back to relationships that were of the closest and most intimate of a ministry kind that they could possibly be, and so this matters. And over the years, over the course of life and Christian experience and going through the word of God as I'm blessed to be able to do and what I

do for ministry and for a living, my thought always goes back to, you don't need to turn there, but my thought always goes back to Proverbs 16:6. Proverbs 16:6 says in its latter part that it is "by the fear of the LORD one keeps away from evil." When you see a man who has engaged a lifestyle of sin, the hypocrisy that would mark a man stepping into a pulpit while he has been in someone else's bed during the week, you are seeing the inevitable fruit of a man who no matter what else he has said in his teaching, in his conferences, in his books, you're seeing a man who inevitably somewhere in the core of his heart did not embrace and did not truly fear the Lord because Scripture says plainly that the fear of the Lord is what keeps a man from evil.

Like I say, it's not a new problem and I invite you to turn to the book of Jonah here as we're going to have those thoughts in mind as we begin and we will circle back to them at the end of today's message. Jonah 1 is our text for this morning. We are beginning after a couple of weeks of introduction, we are beginning an exposition of this book. When I first taught on this book a couple of decades ago, it took four messages for me to get through it. In my preparation, I'm up to 10 messages now and it's probably going to go beyond that, so whatever that means. We're going to look at the first three verses here this morning and there is just so much on my heart that I want to say to you and share with you this morning, and know that I say this, first of all, from a vertical perspective out of what I trust is my own fear of the Lord, but also to minister to you and to your heart. It is so easy to get callous toward your own sin. It is so easy to become oblivious to the log in your own eye and seeing specks in your brother's eye. We all know that Jesus said that, we all know the phenomenon, and so we want to deal with this earnestly in the best of our ability by the help of the Holy Spirit here this morning, and it's such a crucial matter and the book of Jonah introduces it for us in the first three verses.

Chapter 1, verse 1,

1 The word of the LORD came to Jonah the son of Amittai saying, 2 "Arise, go to Nineveh the great city and cry against it, for their wickedness has come up before Me." 3 But Jonah rose up to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD. So he went down to Joppa, found a ship which was going to Tarshish, paid the fare and went down into it to go with them to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD.

He preferred the presence of professional pagan sailors to the presence of the Lord. How did we ever get to this point?

What I want you to see just by way of a preliminary observation is that here we are looking at something that occurred 2,700 years ago from our time place and a prophet, a spokesman for God, is deliberately rebelling against the one who called him into ministry. As I said, we spent the past two weeks introducing the book of Jonah. We saw that he was a wayward prophet from a wayward nation. Jonah's willingness to turn his back on the prophetic call to go to Nineveh was a symptom of the spirit of the northern kingdom of Israel at that time. Israel had set aside its national call to be a priest for God to other nations and wanted nothing to do with that, so they were led by evil men, there

worship was corrupt and they were not at all the people that God had called them and set them apart to be. We looked at that two weeks ago. I believe there will be copies of the CD out there or they are available online for those of you that are new to our ministry.

Last week, we saw some of the historical background kind of in preparation for going through the book verse by verse. What we saw is that elsewhere in Scripture it tells us that Jonah actually had a successful period, a faithful period in his prophetic ministry and under his prophetic influence, along with some of the contemporaries that he was serving as a prophet with, the nation enjoyed a time of material prosperity, of material expansion. We saw that from 2 Kings, and so we realize that when we read about Jonah here in this book, that we're reading about a period, an episode, a season in his life, the complete and only mark of his prophetic ministry. He had actually served the Lord faithfully at other times and so the question that we circle back to that we started with, was how did he ever get to this place? How did he ever get to this place in his spiritual life where he preferred going away from what the Lord had called him to do rather than simply following in obedience.

Well, we said that there were some historical factors to that as we looked at it last time. Nineveh was a great city, one of the great cities in the ancient world at that time, a very important city in the nation of Assyria, and what we saw was that Assyria was a rival, was a military and a political and a geographic rival to the nation of Israel. It was in the national interest of the nation of Israel for Assyria to be weak and to be decimated and Jonah wanted no part in something that might somehow revive them from their period of weakness that they were experiencing at that time in world history. We saw last time that Nineveh, most likely at the time that Jonah came to them, was in a time of despair and decline. Plagues had been rampant in the time period. There was a solar eclipse which to them was a sign of imminent divine judgment in the very era of Jonah, June 15, 763 BC. So the people were suffering physically, spiritually they were afraid, this was a time of great despair for them and somewhere – again, all of that available in the last two messages, this is just a thumbnail review – somewhere in the course of his ministry and somewhere in the course of the suffering of the people of Nineveh in that narrow window of their time, God calls Jonah to another task and we see it here in verse 1.

Look at it there with me,

1 The word of the LORD came to Jonah the son of Amittai

Now, this phrase "The word of the LORD came to" him, it's a standard expression that introduces an utterance that God gave to the prophet. It was a direct inspiration from God for what he was to say and what was to follow. The prophet was not a teacher of God's word when he was delivering revelation from God, he was a spokesman, he was a mouthpiece for the very direct words of God through the prophet to the people that he was called to represent. So it was more than just an act of interpretation, it is claiming direct inspiration from God for what follows.

Now it's interesting, Scripture doesn't really often give us any sense of how the utterance came to the prophet, how the word of God came to him, and there is no description of the means of it here. Was it a mental impression in his mind? Was there a voice from heaven? Did the pre-Incarnate Christ somehow appear to him? We don't know and we don't need to know. What the lack of those kinds of details does for us is it clears our minds and it prevents confusion so that we can look clearly at what the Lord actually had to say. The means by which it was delivered to Jonah is less important than the content of what he was to go and say. So we are free to focus on that.

We know nothing about his father, Amittai. We're told that his name means "truthful or loyal," but that doesn't really lend anything more to the discussion than that, it simply places Jonah in a historical setting that the audience who first received his book would have known and understood.

So what did the Lord say to Jonah exactly? Verse 2,

2 "Arise, go to Nineveh the great city and cry against it, for their wickedness has come up before Me."

For all of their desperation, the people of Nineveh were sinful, they were wicked, the time was ripe for their judgment, and God is saying, "The time has come for me to declare my word to them, Jonah, so I want you to arise and go there. I want you to respond promptly and go to Nineveh."

Now, as we said last time or in the week before, they all kind of blend together in my mind, this command to go to Nineveh was unusual because the ordinary pattern for the prophets of Israel were for them to prophesy to their own people within the boundaries of their own nation. Here God is giving something unusual to Jonah, sending him beyond the national boundaries, sending him beyond the people of Israel to preach to a foreign people. Now while this was unusual from the prophetic perspective, from the prophetic office at that time, this is perfectly consistent with the broader history that God had called Israel to do. We looked at Genesis 12 when he called Abraham and promised him a great people, that his descendants would be like the stars, and he said the purpose of this is so that there would be a blessing to the nations, a blessing to the nations and we looked at all of that. So while this is unusual for the prophet, it is consistent with the broader purpose for which God called the people of Israel out in order to belong to him. So as we open the book, we have something that's already very striking by the very terms on which it is introduced.

So God says, "Arise, go to Nineveh," and look at it there in verse 2 with me, "cry against it." Cry against it. This is an indication that Jonah is to go and make a prophetic proclamation of God's will to these people. "You go and you tell them what I have to say." And Jonah as a prophet, was a servant of the Lord. He was meant to be under direct immediate obedience to the Lord who had called him to his office. So many times as you read through the Old Testament, you will see God referring to the prophets by this term, "My servants, the prophets. My servants, the prophets. The ones who are serving me.

They are instruments of my will, instruments of my proclamation, instruments of my revelation." Now, you think about that, that's a pretty lofty and privileged position to be in, isn't it? To be a direct servant of the Most High God, to be a vehicle of his revelation to mankind, you would think that a prophet would tremble under the weight of the majesty of such a call on his life, and you would think that there would be a sense of eagerness to follow, but if you think that it's always that way, then there's something that's missing in your calculation, there is something that's missing in your calculation and understanding of the nature of man, there is something that is missing that we need to unpack and unfold for us here today because Jonah was a man of like flesh and like passions as we were and his life, sadly, shows the effect of that. The message that God had for Nineveh was simple. It was straightforward. It was brief. Jonah goes to warn them that God is preparing to judge them. That's what he was supposed to go and say, and so that's what the call was as we see it in verse 2.

Now, as you read your Bible, as you read through the Old Testament, we are used to prophets speaking with courage. We're used to prophets showing forth a measure of fortitude in the midst of opposition, continuing to preach even though they suffer for it. We are used to prophets continuing to preach even if it puts them in a humiliating position. We are used, like Elijah against the prophets of Baal, of a prophet standing alone against the world in fidelity to the God who called him to preach. We're not used to seeing a prophet cave before he even gets into the ministry that he's called to. Jeremiah in Jeremiah 20 spoke of the prophetic burden of preaching and he said, "It's like a fire shut up in my bones and I can't endure holding it in! I have to speak because the internal pressure of what is on my heart and what the Lord has commanded me to speak is too great for me to be able to contain! I have to give vent to it or I will burst!" So when we see Jonah's response that we are also familiar with, it defies everything that we've come to expect from God's prophets.

Look at verse 3,

3 But Jonah rose up to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD.

What? I must have sleep in my eyes. I can't be reading this properly. This can't be what a prophet did. But it is. God commissions him to a task and he runs away. God's servant is now a rebel. God's spokesman is now in defiance toward him, and when I say defiance, the geography of this is stunning. His destination of Tarshish was the most defiant place that he could have possibly gone. It's not simply that he went back to his home and locked the door and stayed inside and refused to go out, God called him to Nineveh and Jonah goes to Tarshish.

Let me give you a picture of what this is like. You all can have a mental image in your mind of the Mediterranean Sea, right? Kind of a roughly speaking a football-shaped body of water over below Europe and north of Africa, just picturing that generally in your mind. The Mediterranean Sea is about 2,300 miles wide, a little more than the distance from Cincinnati to Los Angeles. Nineveh, the city, was some 400 miles east of the Mediterranean Sea. Just a little bit of geography helps understand what's going on here.

So you've got the Mediterranean Sea 2,300 miles wide, you've got Nineveh roughly off to the east another 400-500 miles or so, but where is Tarshish? Most likely, Tarshish was west. Tarshish was most likely at the southern tip of Spain. That was the western-most point of the known world at this time. To put it in simple compass terms, God tells Jonah, "Go east." Jonah says, "No, I'll go west," so much so that he was heading to a city that was some 2,700 miles from the destination that God had called him to go. In roughest terms, it would be like saying, "Go to New York," and you say, "No, I'm going to the beaches of LA." It could not have been a more defiant response to a direct command from the Lord that he was called to serve, so much so that to get on that ship that was going that direction, Jonah literally physically had to turn his back on the call of God in order to go that direction.

The city of Joppa was a Mediterranean seaport in western Israel that he was going to. Commentators tell us that he paid a good sum of money to get onto that ship. And to give you a sense of what Jonah had in mind, these background historical information pieces are helpful to us to have perspective on it, and it's not a violation of Sola Scriptura to speak to things that are attested in history, that's a foolish bit of thinking that some engage in. In Solomon's day, the ships that would go to Tarshish would not return for three years and a ship of the size that Jonah was getting on would have had a crew of less than a dozen people or so. Their cargo was grain and wine and olive oil and they are in the midst of this great trade for economic prosperity.

So Jonah refuses the call, he turns his back on Nineveh, wants to go the exact opposite direction, but he's doing something else, beloved, when you think about it. Jonah is fleeing from the geographic area where God had manifested his presence. He fled from his assignment to Nineveh. Now, Jonah would have known about the omnipresence of the Lord, he would have known that God was everywhere present, but somehow he thought that he could avoid preaching to Nineveh if he got on that boat, went the opposite direction and spent a period of years doing something else and the question is: what was he thinking? How could he have gotten to this point? Why would he have rebelled against that call?

Well, if you peek ahead to Jonah 4:2, you find the answer, and in some ways I'm reluctant to do this but when we're going to be several weeks in the book, we need to understand something of what's motivating Jonah here at the start. After Nineveh repents at his preaching when he goes there the second time, in chapter 4, verse 1, you find that it greatly displeased Jonah, so we're just looking ahead to help us come back and understand what's going on within.

1 ... it greatly displeased Jonah and he became angry. 2 He prayed to the LORD and said, "Please LORD, was not this what I said while I was still in my own country? Therefore in order to forestall this I fled to Tarshish, for I knew that You are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, and one who relents concerning calamity.

Let's take that little bit of information and come back to Jonah 1 realizing that we have in Jonah's own words an insight into what his motives were when he got on that boat to go to Tarshish. It's stunning. He says in his own words, "God, I knew," let me put it in the present tense so that we are with him on the pier getting into the boat and what he's thinking in his heart when he gets into the ship to go west to Tarshish. Here's what's in his mind, he is saying, "If I go to Nineveh, I know just what God is going to do because I know what he's like. He's compassionate, he's gracious and if I go to Nineveh, God is going to show grace to those people. God is going to bring his compassion to bear upon them and somehow they are going to become recipients of his mercy if I go, and I don't want that. I don't want these people to know God's mercy. I like life the way it is. I like my country strong without a rival." In other words, Jonah had his own agenda and he rebelled in the most flagrant way that he possibly could have rebelled at the time.

What are we to make of this? Well, it's intriguing, isn't it? It's intriguing to realize that his knowledge of God was actually solid when he did this. I mean, look at verse 2 there again with me in chapter 4, he has given a description of God that has echoes of Exodus 34 when God revealed his name to Moses, "I know you're gracious, you are compassionate, you are slow to anger, you are abundant in lovingkindness, you relent concerning calamity. I know who you are, I just don't want you to be like that to these people anyway." You know, you go back to the question that we opened with: how could a pastor preach and speak these things and yet be living a life of hypocrisy and a double life like they do, like they must? You know, these men that rebuke you for your sin while engaging in it themselves? You see here that Jonah had a solid theology while he was pursuing his sin. That's why I say this isn't a new problem with today's pastors and their moral failures. Jonah failed in the midst of a solid theology and you ask the question: how could this happen, then? How could he rebel? How could he turn against everything that he knew? How could he defy the God who had given him the privilege of the prophetic office? Let me rephrase the question: how do you explain your own sin when you have a similar knowledge of God yourself as a believer? How do you explain that? How do you account for that? How do you justify that?

You see, this is not unique to Jonah. This is endemic to the human race. This is a problem for all of us and ultimately to get to the explanation here that I want to kind of expand out on in other scriptures and apply some things from a New Testament perspective, ultimately beloved, what you find here is that Jonah had not dealt with his sinful heart in private. Jonah had these agitations of worldliness in his heart, these agitations of resentment against God in his heart, had a narrowmindedness and an indifference to the people to whom he was called in his heart. He had a pride in his heart that preferred his own opinion to submission to what God had called him to do. So beloved, what happens to Jonah here is this: because he had not dealt with the sin in his heart, because he had not dealt with sin in private, his sin became known in public. His sin found him out, as Scripture says that it will do. Don't be deceived, God is not mocked. Whatever a man sows, this he will also reap. When a man sows to sin privately in ministry, eventually the fruit of the harvest is going to be known in public, and there is this infinite capacity of a man to deceive himself into thinking that he'll be the exception or he just doesn't care or somehow he bifurcates life from ministry in a way that makes him think that he can get

away with it and shows, as I said earlier, shows ultimately that somewhere the core of his theological knowledge had not gripped him with an actual fear of God that would motivate him to obedience. But as I said, beloved, this isn't unique to Jonah. The prophet Isaiah who was a contemporary of Jonah said that all of us like sheep have gone astray; each of us has turned to his own way. You see, the spiritual leaders of today, Jonah in his day, were simply a manifestation of the broader problem of human sin.

You say, "But why would he do that? Why would Jonah do that? Why would a man in ministry risk everything that he has worked for and built a reputation for and devoted years of his life and training to, why would he risk it all for a few episodes of alcoholic or physical intoxication? Why would he do that?" When the question is framed like that and it seems so puzzling to you and this is a dilemma that you just can't seem to solve and understand, there is an opportunity for us here to grow spiritually, to grow in our understanding, to grow in our discernment, to grow in our own ability to guard against sin, to grow in our own sanctification. You see, the question why would he do that assumes that the man is acting rationally; that he has considered these things, counted the cost and said, "I'll do this anyway." You see, what you're missing in this equation is this: it is the whole nature of sin that it's not rational. It is destructive to the man. It is destructive to the woman. But the human heart is so twisted that it ignores that for the sake of the momentary passing pleasures of sin, thinking somehow, deluded into thinking that he'll be the exception, that you will be the exception, that you won't be caught, you're too clever for God, you're too clever for your spouse, you're too clever for your parents, and no one is going to find out. No fear of God animating the thought pattern there, just what I want and I think I can get away with it.

You see, beloved, what we're trying to do here today among many other things, what we're trying to do here is to cultivate a sense of the fear of the Lord in our hearts from God's word which is the place where that comes, a sense of the fear of the Lord so that we would learn to be afraid of sin, afraid of sinning, and want to deal with the sin in our heart privately for the glory of God, for the honor of Christ who died to save us from it, to avoid bringing dishonor to his name with the conduct of our lives, and to avoid bringing shame and reproach on our own testimony. You know, there is a reason that Scripture says a man is permanently disqualified from ministry when he falls into that kind of immorality, it's because you can no longer separate the reproach from the man himself. "So-and-so, oh yeah, he's the guy that committed adultery against his wife. Yeah, he's the guy that was the big conference speaker and he lost his position because two different affairs were brought out at the same time." And you can't separate the two so that it becomes an impediment to the proclamation of the word of God, it becomes an impediment to taking the holiness of God seriously if a man after that has been exposed in his life continues to preach, because you can't separate his sin from his lips.

So what we see is that sin – mark this – sin will always, beloved, take you places that you don't want to go. It will take you places that you never intended. And as one friend of mine many years ago, I don't even remember who the friend was but it's not an original thought to me, said when a man falls into sin like that, it's not that he has fallen off a cliff, it's that he has walked down a staircase step-by-step going down, just like Jonah went

down to Joppa, went down to the ship, went down into the hull of the ship. This doesn't just happen overnight, this is the fruit of something that has been going on in the heart for a long period of time.

While I'm at it, this is a side note, I just want to get this out of the way before we go into some of the New Testament things that I want to say, and I say this with a lot of sympathy. I know that what I'm about to say has been the experience of families within our church, outside of our church, but this needs to be said. The only ultimate, final, sure power against sin is the Lord Jesus Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit in the heart of a man, and I realize that well-meaning people have developed programs that are designed to help people be accountable so that they don't fall into looking at pornography on their computers. So you set up, you install this program, and if you go to a bad site, it sends a message out to somebody to let them know that you've been up to naughty things. Now, the idea being that the fear of that accountability to man will help a person stay away from it. Let me say two or three things about that because this is really important. My unanimous experience in pastoral ministry with those programs has been this, unanimously whenever it comes to my attention, whenever somebody has been doing it, without exception and without fail the story that comes out is that somehow the guy who is supposed to be being held accountable finds ways around it. He finds other devices. He goes other places. He knows the technology better than his accountability partner and so he finds a way to short-circuit the process. Why does he do that? Well, the lusts are consuming him and he loves the sin, we get that part of it, but what I want you to see is this, is that it is the fear of the Lord that keeps a man from sin and a fear of man, which is what this accountability software is ultimately based on, is not sufficient to restrain and change the human heart and its love for sin. They'll just say, "I'll find a way around this."

So it ultimately ends up forestalling the problem. Look, I don't mind if people use that software and maybe somewhere it's actually helped and it keeps a little bit of light and accountability on the progress, but if the goal is ultimately to free a guy from his love for sin, you have to go to his heart with the power of the Gospel, with a love for Jesus Christ, with a fear of the God of the Bible, for that to change. Fear of man is not going to do it. Why? Because people love their sin more than they fear man. In fact, look at John 3. People love sin more than they want the Gospel. There is just so much here that's at stake. John 3:20 says,

20 ... everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed.

If men will reject Christ, will reject the hope of eternal life so that they can keep their deeds and their sins in darkness covered up, do you think a computer program is going to change their heart? So whatever else we do with that stuff, we need to realize its limitations and realize what the real need here is the Gospel applied to the inner man of the heart with power by the Holy Spirit that produces a fear of God and a love for Christ. That's what frees people from sin and if we are neglecting the heart in these kinds of matters, it's just a matter of time before it fails and shows that there were ways around it.

It's a false hope. It's a reliance on Egypt rather than a trust in the Lord and an emphasis on the preeminence of Christ.

Now with that said, let's go back to this point: sin takes you places that you never intended to go. Sin is not rational. What sin does, what external deeds of sin show in Jonah's case, in disqualified pastors places, in your own life, what sin does is it is simply a symptom of a disordered, sinful, rebellious heart. The inner man is the ultimate problem here.

Mark 7, turn there with me, if you would. The Gospel of Mark 7, and as you're turning there, there are people that want to make Christianity about foods and rules and observing different days and all of these external rituals and observances, beloved, do you know what Scripture says about that? Scripture says about all of it, Paul dismisses all of it in Colossians 2 saying it has the appearance of wisdom but it is of no use in restraining the sinful lusts of the flesh. There is no power in any of that stuff. That's a loose paraphrase of Colossians 2. Jesus, by contrast, shows us what the problem is and he says in verse 20 of Mark 7,

20 ... "That which proceeds out of the man, that is what defiles the man."

We ask the question between verse 20 and verse 21: where does sin come from? Where did Jonah's disobedience come from? Where do adulteries and lusts and all of this other stuff come from? Jesus lays it out in unmistakable terms. Verse 21,

21 "For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, 22 deeds of coveting and wickedness, as well as deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness. 23 All these evil things proceed from within and defile the man."

He's saying that the fountain of sin is not external, it's internal. It is inside you. Your heart is twisted. It is sinful. It is in rebellion against God. So when these things come out, like a good doctor looking at symptoms, says, "Okay, I see what the symptoms are, the question that I have as a doctor, as a physician, I've got to get to the root cause. What is it in the body that is producing these symptoms? If I just treat the symptoms and leave the underlying cause unchanged, I've actually made things worse because the disease is still rampant inside even though I have masked the symptoms." Well, in like manner, when we just saddle people with external regulations and external rules and rituals to follow, we haven't dealt with the root cause of why they are sinful in the first place. Anger, lust, bitterness, greed, when foul words come out of your mouth because you stubbed your toe or somebody has done something you didn't like and there is this outburst of anger, you say, "Oh, that's not the real me. That was just a moment." No. No. No. What came out was an indication of what was within.

So we have to do away with this self-flattery that we give to ourselves and give to each other, that I'm a basically good person but these things in my life are just the exception.

Jesus says those things show that there is something going on in your heart, and when these kinds of things are the dominant pattern of your life, what you need to see, what you need to understand is that these sins in your heart are showing you what the real you is like, and this is a very crucial pivot point, crucial bridge in our message for us to recognize here. It would have been so simple, so easy to preach the first chapter of Jonah all in one hour, for all of us to kind of chuckle at Jonah and say, "Look at what he did," and miss what his life represents back to us. Yes, Jonah was a rebel but the rebel that should most concern each one of us is the one in the mirror. You see, the biblical picture is not one of men and women who are basically good and sometimes fall, the biblical understanding is men sin and act because they are sinners by nature. This can be a little bit of an elusive little statement but it's really really critical: it's not that you are a sinner because you sin, you sin because you are a sinner and your individual acts and attitudes and words and deeds of sin are a reflection of a corrupt nature that needs to be redeemed by Christ. That's the point but that's a whole lot more uncomfortable. This is crushing human pride at this point. We can't congratulate ourselves, "I'm a pretty good guy." Show me chapter and verse in Scripture, which is the only truth, that says that.

Friend, and I say that sincerely, I say all of these things with the most sincere desire that I know in my heart for your spiritual well-being. I'm of like human flesh with you. We're all in this pot of stew together. Jesus Christ did not come into the world because you needed a slight spiritual modification. He didn't come to kind of help you over the finish line in your efforts at righteousness. You know, you got the ball down to the 3 yard line and he carries it over the goal. You got 97 yards and you needed Christ to go the other 3. That's not the picture. That's not it at all and sometimes I worry that even within this room, we are populated with people who don't get that, and what a treasonous act on my part toward the God who put me in the ministry it would be if I didn't somehow, sometime make that plain and state it. Jesus Christ did not come because you were ailing, Jesus Christ came because you were dead. Jesus Christ didn't come simply because you needed a little bit of help, Jesus Christ came because you needed a spiritual resurrection, you needed to be born again because as you were in nature coming out of your mother's womb, you were dead in trespasses and sins.

Now, as we work through these things and now we kind of bring it back and we pull things back, we pull our consideration back in and want to speak within the context of speaking to the body of Christ here, and I'm going to go through a lot of things really really quickly here, and the point that I want to help you with is to recognize the crucial nature of dealing with the sins of your heart in private rather than neglecting them and finding that they have become an underwater current that has taken you far down the river to a place you never thought you would end up in. The sin in your heart is like a massive undertow that would pull you away if you don't give heed to it, and Scripture says we all stumble in many ways, James 3:2, and I want to just give you a little bit of a quick fly through of biblical thought to raise your awareness of the areas of sin that you need to be on guard against, not everyone equally overwhelmed by each of these, but it's just so easy in our hyper-sexualized culture to think that it's only a matter of sexual sin that matters, and if that's not an issue, then everything else must be okay. Look, Jonah's problem was not sexual sin here and it wasn't okay with him. So I just want to walk

through some things really quickly and then in the end give you what I think is the key for a Christian, born again, having the Spirit of God dwelling within him, to understand how to be on guard lest the undercurrent of sin in your own heart carry you away too.

So I've got 10 things here that I'm going to go through really really quickly with one Scripture passage for each one of them, keeping in mind – I'll say this one last time – that we are talking about a realm of your life and a realm of your existence where no one sees but God alone. We're not talking about what other people see in you. It doesn't matter that other people might not realize that this is what you're like on the inside. The thing that should matter for you is that it is true and out of a fear of the Lord and out of a love for Christ, that you would slay sin in your heart, mortify it, to use the old time word, to deal with sin at the level of desire and attitude before it ever has opportunity to take control and put you into a realm of conduct that other men can see. So 10 little quick things. This is going to be a fast survey. I'm going to give you 10 areas of heart sins to be on guard against lest you end up in a place like Jonah that you never thought you would go.

First of all, we will start with the area of sexual temptation, recognize the pull of sexual lust. Look at Proverbs 9, and you're going to have to turn really quick, and actually as you're turning to Proverbs, that's perfect because go back just a little bit further as we start, Proverbs 4:23.

23 Watch over your heart with all diligence, For from it flow the springs of life.

Watch your heart. Watch your inner man. Be aware of the things that you are thinking, the things that you are desiring, and keep watch over them lest your heart which has a bent toward sinning, I'm pretty sure we just sang about that earlier in the service, "Take away our bent for sinning," the first key for you to realize is that there is within your inner man a bent toward sin that you need to guard against, that in Christ you have the power to overcome, but you need to guard against it.

So what are those things that you might look for? I'm just going to give you 10 as a sampling, just to stimulate your thinking here. 1. Sexual temptation. Proverbs 9:13. Odd place to go, perhaps, but you'll see why it is. There is this call that would lure you into sin, that would appeal to your heart. Verse 13,

13 The woman of folly is boisterous, She is naive and knows nothing. 14 She sits at the doorway of her house, On a seat by the high places of the city, 15 Calling to those who pass by, Who are making their paths straight [somebody trying to live a righteous life]; 16 "Whoever is naive, let him turn in here," And to him who lacks understanding she says, 17 "Stolen water is sweet; And bread eaten in secret is pleasant."

"Come someplace. No one will know. We'll fill ourselves with love and pleasure in private and we'll go on and no one will be the wiser." In verse 18, Scripture gives the warning,

18 But he does not know that the dead are there, That her guests are in the depths of Sheol.

This area has brought countless men down and in our hyper-sexualized world where pornography has gone mainstream, for crying out loud, all the more for you and me as men and women who want to honor Christ with our lives to guard our hearts at the first impulse of such desires.

Secondly, marital conflict. Marital conflict. Turn now to your New Testament and one of the things that you find is in the midst of many of these things that we are going to look at, you're going to find these allusions to Satan, to the devil, recognizing that we are in the midst of a supernatural battle in the midst of these things. Marital conflict. 1 Corinthians 7, and we'll try to be discreet in our comments here, but speaking of the realm of marital intimacy, Scripture tells a husband, tells a wife, tells them together,

5 Stop depriving one another, except by agreement for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer, and come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.

Look, I understand that intimacy is an easy weapon to wield against your spouse. Scripture specifically tells you, "Don't do that." If there is marital conflict, deal with the conflict rather than dealing with using that intimacy as a weapon to hurt, to deprive your spouse. Be aware of marital conflict. Deal with it before it comes out in other areas.

Thirdly, the whole matter of spiritual pride. By the way, I've organized these simply so we could just go through canonically. They are not listed in any other order of preference, just that this would make it simple. Spiritual pride. 1 Corinthians 10:12,

12 Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall.

"What you're talking about, preacher, that ain't gonna happen to me. I'm committed." Scripture says, "Be on guard." The very words that you speak betray the fact that you're more vulnerable than you think and my prayer to God through ministry, "Before I would fall into disqualifying sin, Lord, take my life. Kill me. Kill me before letting that happen." Better to die than to bring reproach on Christ.

Fourthly, in your heart matters of anger. Matters of anger. Look at Ephesians 4. And all of this we're going to wrap up in a positive direction forward and what do we do, so just stay with me. Sexual temptation, marital conflict, spiritual pride, the whole matter of anger. Ephesians 4:26, the warning against letting it take root,

26 Be angry, and yet do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger,
27 and do not give the devil an opportunity.

Are you a person mad at the world, mad at your spouse, mad at somebody, over something from a long time ago or recent? Beloved, I beg you in the name of Christ, come to grips with that sin in your heart because it will take you places that you never wanted to go.

Fifthly, always a good reminder for those of us that live in a land of great prosperity like we do in the Western culture in the United States. 1 Timothy 6. A love of money. A love of money. 1 Timothy 6:9,

9 But those who want to get rich

Notice he's talking in the realm of desires, he's talking about what's going on in their heart. They want to get rich. What happens to them? Where does that take them?

[they] fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction. 10 For the love of money [look, the love, the desire, greed] is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.

If your heart is captivated by the pursuit of wealth and captivated but the pursuit of the latest stuff and worldly stuff, realize that there are motions of sin in your heart that are very dangerous. So Scripture comes and brings a word of warning to you. Deal with your heart, deal with the fact that this world is passing away, deal with this, deal with this, this is from a friend of mine from many years ago. We've all heard it said you can't take it with you, right? We're all just going to die and leave it all behind so the pursuit of it is really foolish as a goal in life. If it comes, it goes, fine, great. We're not talking about whether you're actually wealthy or not, we're simply talking about what you want, what you desire, what motivates you and what your passion in life is. Look, you're not taking a cent of it in the coffin into the ground with you. That currency doesn't count in the economy of God. I have a friend who puts it this way, memorable, it has stayed with me all these years and I've thought about it through most of the funerals that I've done over 20 years of ministry. His way of putting it is, he says, "Look, remember, 30 minutes after your funeral is over, people are going to be eating potato salad," and our pride and our pursuits is measured against that and is found for the emptiness that it is. The love of money. Beware.

Sixthly, again these are in canonical order, not in order of importance. Turn to Hebrews 2. You could say spiritual indifference. Spiritual indifference. Neglect of the word of God, neglect of gathering together with his people, neglect of prayer. Chapter 2, verse 1. Spiritual indifference, the point here.

1 For this reason we must pay much closer attention [an inner attitude, an inner pursuit] to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away from it.

7. Bitterness. Hebrews 12. Bitterness being that inner agitation over a wrong real or perceived that someone has done against you. Bitterness being the motivating factor of the most prominent move in evangelicalism today in the so-called Christian justice movement. Hebrews 12:15,

15 See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled;

See to it that this doesn't happen. Give heed to the springs of your heart. Watch over your heart with all diligence against your proclivities toward sexual temptation, toward marital conflict, toward spiritual pride, toward anger, toward your love of money, your love of this world. Give heed to your spiritual indifference. Give heed to your bitterness. Yeah, they sinned against you. Okay, we get that. You sinned against God and God forgave you. Does that have any bearing on the way that you view life, on the way you view the world, on the way that you view the structures of society? That's really directed to people outside the walls of the church, that last thing I said, but they're not going to listen to this so I said it to you instead.

Eighth, your love for the approval of men. Love for the approval of men. James 4:4, the next book over from Hebrews.

4 You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

Your friendships, your affections, the approval, your love for the praise of men, when you see that activated, when you see that active in your heart, you've got to put it to death because it will lead you astray and you will find yourself, metaphorically speaking, in the middle of the ocean of God's discipline, drowning in the midst of it, crying out for someone to save you and never even recognizing that you're underwater because of a heart sin that you didn't deal with way back when. I'm telling you the truth here and do you know what else? I can't do this for you. It's not even my job to do this for you. I can't control what goes on in your heart and in your mind. I can't control what your desires are. It would be foolish of me to try and it would be ineffective if I did. You have the spiritual responsibility, each one of you, to respond to God's word in this way yourself.

9. Almost done here, two more to go. Theological error. That one surprises you, doesn't it? Theological error, but look at 2 Peter 3. Why is truth so important? What is it that sanctifies the people of God? What is it that sanctifies a man or woman of God? Jesus prayed, John 17:17, "Father, sanctify them in the truth. Your word is truth." When error is taught, when truth is hidden, when Scriptures are not faithfully exposed and expounded, sin is the inevitable outworking of that because people live by the convictions that are in their heart and if your belief system is skewed, your life is going to be skewed also. That's why the study of the word of God is so critical. That's why we emphasize that here at Truth Community Church, it's for your benefit, beloved. I realize this isn't a pony show, I realize I'm not riding in on a rodeo, as others have done in our area, it's because

we have better things to do. 2 Peter 3:17, actually go to verse 16. Peter is talking about how difficult Paul's letters are to understand and watch what happens when the word of God is twisted. Verse 16, Paul,

16 as also in all his letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction. 17 You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand [calculating this into your worldview now rather than later when it's too late, ahead of time have this attitude in your heart], be on your guard so that you are not carried away by the error of unprincipled men and fall from your own steadfastness,

Truth matters. Truth matters. Show me a man indifferent, casual toward truth, indiscriminating in what he takes in, I'll show you a man whose life will eventually show it in sin, in disgrace, in dishonoring of Christ. Look at it again. Do you want to know why we preach God's word at Truth Community Church? It's to help you, among other things, it's to help you right here, that you would be on your guard so that you would not be carried away by the error of unprincipled men and your life would be marked by a fall.

Ultimately, 10, a lost affection for Christ. Or better stated, guard your affection for Christ. Look at Revelation 2. We're at the end of this little sprint. Revelation 2:4, Christ says to the church at Ephesus,

4 ... I have this against you, that you have left your first love.

You started well, who hindered you from obeying the truth? You started with a flame for Christ in your heart, why does it flicker as though it's going out?

I'll tell you another story, another aspect of pastoral ministry that I've come to recognize and appreciate. I think I mentioned it before. There is a pattern that takes place in a local church, at least in this one. When we were at the other place, when we are here, you can see it happening. The people involved don't even have to tell you a word about what's going on. It's so simple. It's this. I've seen this I don't know how many times, people who come and at the start they sit up front and over time you watch and they start to go from row 2 to row 5, row 5 to row 8, row 8 to row 16, row 16 to the door by the corner, and then you never see them again. Their physical proximity indicating something that's going on in their life, indicating a drift. You know, elders, we talk to them and most of the time it doesn't do any good. Do you want to know what I lose sleep over at night? That's a big part of it, just watching people drift. So often, beloved, so often you go and you say, "Can we at least talk about this?" And they won't even discuss it. That's not a problem with the church. That's an indication of something going on inside a human heart, a drift that is spiritual but that can be recognized even geographically within a room like this, it's amazing.

So how do you deal with that? How do you deal with that? Well, first of all, if you're convicted that you're not even a Christian, I invite you to come to Christ because he in

love calls you and says, "I will deliver you from that sin which captivates your heart." He has the power to do that. Through his death and resurrection, Christ calls you to come. "I will save you from sin. Come to me by faith. I will make you mine. The door is wide open for you to be delivered from your sin." There is nothing in Christ that hinders you from coming. The offer is free, it is immediate. You can come to Christ now and be saved.

What about for those of us in the body of Christ? Well, let me wrap this up. What is it, then? What is it, then? If we see in Jonah that theological knowledge alone is not enough to prevent a man from falling into sin, he had the knowledge, he failed miserably, if that alone isn't enough, if being behind a pulpit, being in ministry won't keep men from sin of the most egregious kind, if that's not enough, you know, I wouldn't blame you if you're saying, "Well, what hope is there for me, then, if a prophet and a pastor can fall like this? What hope is there for me? Is this just inevitable? Is this to be the new normal? Is this what we accept as the people of God?" God forbid, in the Greek, *me genoito*, may it never be. No, there is more than abundant provision in Christ. Remember that to be a Christian is to have the Spirit of God dwelling within you to help you in your spiritual life. We have the word of God which sanctifies us. But I think that we find a real key, a real direction, a foothold to stand on when we look at the Lord's prayer in Matthew 6 and I just want to show you something really quickly and then I'll stop talking.

Look at how Jesus taught us to pray. Beloved, this is a matter that you deal with by faith, by trust. I'm not calling you to try harder in this message. I'm not calling you to a bunch of rules to guard your life by, to guide your life by, am I? I haven't said anything like that. This isn't a matter of practiced legalism, this comes down to the way that we exercise faith in Christ as we walk with him. You know the Lord's prayer, verse 9, "Pray, then, in this way." Jesus commands us, make this your pattern of prayer, "Our Father who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done, On earth as it is in heaven." Father, I submit to you. I praise you, I seek your kingdom, I bow to your will. Then look at what he goes on and says. This is the exercise of the faith of one who wants to live righteously, who wants to not be swept away by sin. Verse 11, "Give us this day our daily bread." Look at that word "daily." "And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And," here we go. In prayer, quietly, privately, you alone with God, pleading with Christ, pleading with God for a work of the Spirit in your heart that says verse 13, "do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil."

"God, I have this heart that is prone to all of these sins. I'm in conflict with the people that are closest to me perpetually because I'm so irritated and bitter against them and, God, I see even though nothing has burst out, I see what's happening and the agitations of my heart and, God, I name it as sin. I name it for what it is, rebellion against you. And God, I come to you in the name of Christ, praying as he taught me to, day by day, sometimes moment by moment, saying, God, deliver me from temptation. God, take me out of this. Keep me from that kind of evil. God, I feel the weight of sexual temptation, marital conflict. I know that I'm prone to pride. People have told me that. I'm a proud man and I won't listen to them, Lord. I'm prone to anger. I love money. God, I don't even know where my Bible is, let alone when the last time was I opened it and read it. I've been

spiritually indifferent. I'm bitter over the past. I love the praise of men more than I love the approval of God, Lord. I've been careless. I've followed teachers in error. In short, Lord, I've lost my affection for Christ and, God, here I am and I just pray that you would deliver me from this mess that is my own heart and lead me not into temptation but deliver me from evil," so that your professed desire for holiness finds its expression by faith in Christ and you flee to him – mark this – humbly, dependently, seeking him.

Daily is the word there in Scripture. You see, beloved, your self-will and your resolution is not enough. It's not enough. In some ways it's not even commendable to let that be your first response. "Well, I'm just going to try harder." You haven't come to the end of your own righteousness when you think that way. No, the expression of faith in this pursuit of godliness that turns a rebel into a compliant disciple of Christ, daily reliance on Christ. Daily confession of sin. Daily repentance. And beloved, not simply of your sinful acts but of the sinful passions of which we've enumerated 10. There's a lot more. Repenting of those sinful passions, asking for cleansing, trusting by faith that God would help you and showing by your faith in your private prayer closet when no one is watching, when no one is there to applaud, "God, this is what I really want out of life. Mortify these desires and lead me in the way everlasting."

Father, may it be true for each one of us. May you open hearts to Christ who are convicted by sin and know that they have never been born again. May you help us, Father. Jonah was a rebel, for sure, Father, we need to read and understand that. We need to see that, we need to learn from it, sure, what was written in the former times was written for our instruction, but Lord, ultimately the rebel that we are most concerned about is the rebel within and that rebel, we ask you by the power of Christ, to subdue that we might grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

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