

TUSCULUM HILLS BAPTIST CHURCH
Paul Gunn, Pastor

JONAH AND GOD'S WILL

Jonah 1 and 2

May 17, 2020

For public use: See non-copyright comments at the end of the message.

Here are the three points to my message today:

- God's will was that Jonah go to Nineveh.
- God allowed Jonah to miss his will.
- Jonah repented, then followed God's will.

INTRODUCTION: It is important that we seek God's will in our lives.

Hopefully, this is something you consider regularly. However, I am afraid many Christians wander through life never considering what God's will is. Many people bumble their way through each day never wondering what is God's best, what it is God would have us do or say - or not do or not say in particular situations.

It's the believer's responsibility to learn. Walking around in ignorance provides no benefit whatsoever. Educating ourselves and discerning God's will is an important step for all believers.

In this message, I want you to open your minds to consider God's will on a whole new level. Occasionally, I'll hear someone say, "Well if it's God's will, then such and such will happen, and if it is not God's will, then such and such will not happen." I've heard that related to the building our church plans to build. "If it's God's will, then the building will be there. If it's not God's will, then it won't be there." I tend to believe those types of comments are rather overstated and absolve the individual from actually being involved in the laborious process of discerning, knowing, and following God's will.

It would be too easy to say that no matter what happened, that God made it happen. It would be too easy to blame the results of our bad decisions on God. And what a mess the world would be if we believed that man has a God-given right to make all his decisions without ever seeking to know the will of God.

There has always been debate and discussion about the difference between God's will and man's free will. It is an ongoing debate that will never end. On the one hand, some believe that God makes every single thing happen the way he wants it to happen, period. On the other hand, some believe that God gives man free will to decide on everything.

Both of these extremes have theological problems because Bible stories and scriptures don't follow either point of reasoning entirely.

One truth of scripture is that God knows the future and we do not. God knows the decisions we are going to make before we make them. God has vision, or foreknowledge that we do not.

Another truth of scripture is that God holds people accountable for their decisions, and we have plenty of biblical record of that.

I do not believe that everything that happens is God's will. God has given people free will...that's clear with many biblical examples. God allows things, yes. He allows people to mess up and make bad choices. In that he allows it, it is within his permissive will so to speak, because nothing surprises God.

So the two truths of the foreknowledge of God and the free will of man seem to create a tension that requires us to pray, to be contemplative, and to seek to know God's will.

Today, I want to speak about this topic from the story of Jonah. For Jonah, God's will was for him to deliver a specific message to a specific people.

This sense of tension is really just part of the journey of the life of the believer. The closer we are to God, the more we'll know his will. Hopefully, it will lead us to do his will. However, if we know God and choose not to do his will, then we'll already know in advance what the consequences will be.

EXPLANATION: Enter the prophet named Jonah. Probably everyone watching knows about Jonah and can give a summary of his story. It's a famous story that finds its way into children's books along with Adam and Eve and Noah. But Jonah

is more than just a children's story. It is a story of a man who knew God's will but ran from it.

1-GOD'S WILL WAS THAT JONAH GO TO NINEVEH

SCRIPTURE: Jonah 1:1-11

The word of the LORD came to Jonah son of Amittai: ² "Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me."

³ But Jonah ran away from the LORD and headed for Tarshish. He went down to Joppa, where he found a ship bound for that port. After paying the fare, he went aboard and sailed for Tarshish to flee from the LORD.

⁴ Then the LORD sent a great wind on the sea, and such a violent storm arose that the ship threatened to break up. ⁵ All the sailors were afraid and each cried out to his own god. And they threw the cargo into the sea to lighten the ship.

But Jonah had gone below deck, where he lay down and fell into a deep sleep.

⁶ The captain went to him and said, "How can you sleep? Get up and call on your god! Maybe he will take notice of us so that we will not perish."

⁷ Then the sailors said to each other, "Come, let us cast lots to find out who is responsible for this calamity." They cast lots and the lot fell on Jonah. ⁸ So they asked him, "Tell us, who is responsible for making all this trouble for us? What kind of work do you do? Where do you come from? What is your country? From what people are you?"

⁹ He answered, "I am a Hebrew and I worship the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land."

¹⁰ This terrified them and they asked, "What have you done?" (They knew he was running away from the LORD, because he had already told them so.)

¹¹ The sea was getting rougher and rougher. So they asked him, "What should we do to you to make the sea calm down for us?"

EXPLANATION: Jonah was a Hebrew prophet. Prophets were God's mouthpieces. Jonah wasn't afraid of the message of repentance. He was afraid of the people. The Assyrians were known as a terrible and idolatrous people.

- Their location was to the northeast.
- They were fierce warriors. They treated prisoners ruthlessly.
- They would gladly have killed a prophet of God.

What was God's perfect will for Jonah?

- God's perfect will was for Jonah to go to Nineveh. He didn't do it (at first).
- This goes all the way back to the beginning: God's perfect will for Eve was to not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Instead, Jonah went in the opposite direction. He headed to Tarshish, which was in what we now call Spain, 2000 miles away. Isn't it human nature to go in the opposite direction God wants us to go?

ILLUSTRATION: I took a group of people to South Dakota to do mission work. One of our stops was at the badlands. At an overlook I said, don't anyone go beyond this point. A minute later I overheard one of the youth saying, "Where was it Brother Paul told us not to go?"

ILLUSTRATION: Many people never pray to know God's will out of fear of what God might do. A friend of mine said he always thought if he prayed to know God's will, God would send him to a foreign country to be a missionary and wear one of those khaki shirts with all the pockets.

Do not believe the myth that following God's will will bring you a life of misery. What sounds like misery to one person sounds like a dream to someone else. One person told me he could not think of anything less appealing than running a homeless shelter. Another man said he could not think of anything more enjoyable and challenging.

APPLICATION: Only you can discern God's perfect will for you. Several times, I've had others tell me what God's will was for me, without me asking their opinion. While I thanked people for their thoughts, each time they were wrong.

2-GOD ALLOWED JONAH TO MISS HIS WILL

God's permissive will is a dangerous place to be, yet we all probably spend a lot of time there. By permissive, I mean that a person is not following God's intentional will and God is tolerating it. No doubt we have a patient God.

ILLUSTRATION: Here's one of many examples: Joseph's brothers misbehaved. They mistreated Joseph and sold him into slavery. They were wrong, but God did not kill them. He was patient with them. We read at the end of that story that what was meant for evil against Joseph, God used for good. God tolerated their disobedience. He was patient.

But since God's permissive will is not his intentional will, we should not desire to be there very long. Maybe we do not know what God's will is, especially if we've never considered it before.

ILLUSTRATION: A group of volunteers worked on a church one day along with concrete workers. One of the volunteers started talking to a concrete worker. They struck up a friendship and talked for several days. It just so happens the concrete worker was from another country, and he was running from God. He was running from people who talked to him about God. And now, here he was, a thousand miles from home, working on a church building, with someone talking about God. You know, God knows what we need well before we know it.

For Jonah, the cost of obedience was just too high. It was easier to run. To go as far away as humanly possible.

APPLICATION: Listen to the application of this part of the message: Not obeying costs more than obeying. It would have been better if Jonah had just obeyed, then he would have been spared the ordeal of the storm, the men who thought they had killed him would have been spared all that mess, and Jonah wouldn't have suffered through dealing with the digestive enzymes of a large fish.

3-JONAH REPENTED, THEN FOLLOWED GOD'S WILL

God will accomplish what he wants to accomplish. If not *through* you, *through* someone else. If not *for* you, then *for* someone else.

Jonah was ready to commit suicide by telling the men to throw him over.

- The ultimate way to get God back was to commit suicide by drowning.
- “Ha, God, I’ll show you. I won’t go to Nineveh, no sirreee!”

SCRIPTURE: Jonah 1:12-16

“Pick me up and throw me into the sea,” he replied, “and it will become calm. I know that it is my fault that this great storm has come upon you.”

¹³ Instead, the men did their best to row back to land. But they could not, for the sea grew even wilder than before. ¹⁴ Then they cried out to the LORD, “Please, LORD, do not let us die for taking this man’s life. Do not hold us accountable for killing an innocent man, for you, LORD, have done as you pleased.” ¹⁵ Then they took Jonah and threw him overboard, and the raging sea grew calm. ¹⁶ At this the men greatly feared the LORD, and they offered a sacrifice to the LORD and made vows to him.

At first, they didn’t want to throw him overboard, then they did it.

God, in his love and mercy for Jonah—and because he still had a message for Jonah to deliver—sent a fish to swallow him. In the belly of the fish is where Jonah surrendered to the will of God. It was there he prayed.

SCRIPTURE: Jonah 1:17-2:1-10

¹⁷ Now the LORD provided a huge fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights. From inside the fish Jonah prayed to the LORD his God. He said:

“In my distress I called to the LORD, and he answered me. From deep in the realm of the dead I called for help, and you listened to my cry.

³ You hurled me into the depths, into the very heart of the seas, and the currents swirled about me; all your waves and breakers swept over me.

⁴ I said, ‘I have been banished from your sight; yet I will look again toward your holy temple.’

⁵ The engulfing waters threatened me, the deep surrounded me; seaweed was wrapped around my head.

⁶ To the roots of the mountains I sank down; the earth beneath barred me in forever. But you, LORD my God, brought my life up from the pit.

⁷ *“When my life was ebbing away, I remembered you, LORD, and my prayer rose to you, to your holy temple.*

⁸ *“Those who cling to worthless idols turn away from God’s love for them.*

⁹ *But I, with shouts of grateful praise, will sacrifice to you. What I have vowed I will make good. I will say, ‘Salvation comes from the LORD.’”*

¹⁰ *And the LORD commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land.*

EXPLANATION: God could have easily let Jonah die. Or, God could have ended the story with Jonah being thrown overboard and bringing another person on the scene to go to Nineveh and preach. It seems to me that God works that way many times. If a person refuses God’s perfect will, then he can just find someone else to do what he wants done. I’ve seen that many times with churches. One church isn’t reaching its community, so God finds another group of believers to reach the community, or he starts a group from scratch. I’ve been amazed at churches that spring up out of nowhere and are immediately more effective at reaching people than established churches.

But for some reason that we will never know, God wanted Jonah to be his prophet. He didn’t want anyone else. He intervened in Jonah’s life and then Jonah followed his will. When Jonah went in another direction, God sent a storm to chase him. When Jonah was thrown overboard, God sent a fish, or basically, a submarine to pick him up and deliver him exactly to the place he needed to be. Not only was the repentance of Nineveh part of God’s will, but the transformation of Jonah was part of his will.

APPLICATION: What is the contemporary application of this? Here it is: When it finally becomes clear what God’s will is and you make your decision to do His will, then you will have peace that you have not known before.

ILLUSTRATION: This past week, I heard about a woman who said when she was a child, she knew God wanted her to be a medical missionary. Then she was struck with a debilitating illness that required several surgeries and she was not able to become a doctor or a missionary. Today, her illness requires her to be in the hospital often. She said, “I once thought God wanted me to serve him by being a doctor, but now I know that God wants me to serve him by being a good patient.

CONCLUSION: Here's what I hope you've gleaned from today's message:

- It is God's best that we study, learn, discern, and follow his will.
- If we are rebellious, it is best to repent now.
- After repenting, God will help you find his will.

The best way to know God's will for tomorrow is to be in his will today. God's will for you today is to be obedient to the scripture which tells us that:

Proverbs 26:28: *"Whoever trusts in his own mind is a fool, but he who walks in wisdom will be delivered."* The wisest path to follow is the one that millions have followed. When Jesus arose from the dead, the message of his resurrection spread like wildfire.

Romans 10:9 says *That if you confess with your mouth "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.*

Confess with your mouth – Jesus is Lord. The word *confess* in Greek means “to declare openly, to speak freely.” When you declare that Jesus is Lord, you are admitting that he is Lord over your life. It means you are repenting of your own ways and following him. It means you are making him lord, or boss, of your life.

The second part of that verse is to believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead.

Confess and believe.

God bless you and I trust you'll find peace with God through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ this week.

To preachers, teachers, students, and anyone else reading or using this message: I have posted this for all to use as you see fit. There is no need to cite me as the source. You are free to delete sections, add your own, or do whatever you want. There is no copyright. My request is that you do not copyright or sell my work. I am sharing my preaching notes in good faith with you because I know the challenges of putting together a lesson, especially when your week gets consumed with other things. Use it and enjoy!

I use the NIV translation of scripture because of its conversational nature. Feel free to go to Bible Gateway and copy and paste whichever translation you want to use. This transcript has been edited to an outline format that improves readability and therefore may not exactly follow the video edition.

Find me at www.thbc.com. Click on sermons or YouTube channel: Pastor Paul Gunn
Thanks to Jennifer Anderson for her editing assistance.

Sincerely, Paul Gunn
Tusculum Hills Baptist Church
Nashville, Tennessee
USA