

“Jonah” Pt 1
A Wayward Prophet

Jonah 1:1-6

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November 10, 2023

Jeff: Heavenly Father, we thank you for the many blessings that we have in Jesus Christ. We think chiefly of our salvation and all of the benefits accompanying it, being in Christ. We thank You for being justified and now standing innocent in Your sight. We thank You for adoption, for Your loving arms encircling us and bringing us into Your family, and for our growth in grace that we might be sanctified, that we might come to know You and what it's like to live in Your kingdom as Your children. And Father, thank You for the ability to exercise faith and repentance, for these things are a great joy to us.

And Lord, thank You for the ability to sustain our eyes upon You. We know that's not of our own doing, but it is certainly of You. Our Lord, when we think about the providences that You give to us as opportunities for us to exercise faithfulness we are thankful, although not always overjoyed. O Lord, we pray that we would continually be steadfast in our commitment to You, again not on the basis of our own strength but because of the work that You are doing in each one of us. Lord, thank You that You are fashioning Christ in us.

Lord, we pray that You will bless each one of the men who are here. We're thankful for the opportunity to gather on an early morning on a Friday. And Lord, thank You for the way in which You've knit the hearts of these men together. And Lord, I thank You that You have worked in them to minister to me. And Lord, I pray that You will bless us today as we gather together once again to study Your word. We thank you in Jesus' name. Amen.

Brave Men: Amen.

Jeff: All right. Okay. Well, it's good to be back; thanks for coming. *(Laughter)* You've been here. *(Laughter)* All right. Because I'm a slacker, *(laughter)*, we're going to start off with a series that I've done before. I think it's a series I'd done five years ago. So hopefully everything I've said will be forgotten to you. *(Laughter)*

Ted Wood: Jeff, most of us can't remember what we had for breakfast. *(Laughter)*

Jeff: Well, I mean that I was driving here today and thought to myself: Did I wear this suit coat yesterday? *(Laughter)* So I'm with you. And I thought to myself that if I can't remember what I wore yesterday, maybe you won't remember this series.

So what I want us to do is, I want us to look at Jonah chapter 1. And I think what we'll do is, we'll read the first six verses. Now the reason why I want us to read the first six verses, instead of reading all seventeen verses, is because I know you guys. When I did this series in the past I did all seventeen verses. And you know as well as I do that we did not get through all seventeen verses in one sitting. So I said to myself, "I'm going to be wise going in here. And what I'm going to do is that I'm going to cut this outline in half."

And I know what you guys are gonna do. You guys won't let me get through half of this outline. *(Laughter)* But that's okay. And so we'll look at Jonah 1:1-6 this morning and then we'll see where we are after that. So this is the word of the living God, and may He add His blessing to the reading of it. Listen carefully.

"Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, 'Arise, go to Nineveh that great city, and call out against it, for their evil has come up before Me.'"

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“But Jonah rose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD. He went down to Joppa and found a ship going to Tarshish. So he paid the fare and went down into it to go with them to Tarshish, away from the presence of the LORD.

“But the LORD hurled a great wind upon the sea. And there was a mighty tempest on the sea so that the ship threatened to break up. Then the mariners were afraid, and each cried out to his god. And they hurled the cargo that was in the ship into the sea, to lighten it up for them. But Jonah had gone into the inner part of the ship and had lain down, and was fast asleep.

“So the captain came and said to him, ‘What do you mean, you sleeper? Arise! Call out to your God! Perhaps your God will give a thought to us, that we may not perish.’”

Don Maurer: This is the word of the Lord.

Brave Men: Thanks be to God.

Jeff: Thank you, Don. *(Laughter)*

Don: You’re welcome.

Jeff: Some things never change; you forget. *(Laughter)* All right. So here’s what we’re gonna do, and this would have been the full outline. I’m going to talk about some introductory matters that I think are fairly important. And as I looked into these things again I’m really glad for us to be thinking about these. And then we’re going to be thinking about “no substitutions, please.” The last two we’ll take up the next time, unless you’re an exceptionally quiet group, which I don’t anticipate. *(Laughter)*

So let’s think about some introductory matters. And let me ask you a question. What comes to mind when you think about the Jonah story? At least what comes to mind when you think about a summary of the story? I don’t know about you, but what comes to mind when I think about the Jonah story is that familiarity breeds contempt. In other words, we know the story so well that it sometimes has little to no impact upon us.

And in fact in our culture today, we sometimes hear about the Jonah story in ways that are not good. For instance, how in the world could a whale have swallowed a person? And we have a tendency to listen to those criticisms and they have a way of working on us. We think of it as a little kid’s story to begin with, a story that is repeated over and over to children. And I think we have a tendency not to think much of it. And evangelicals of course give it a nod and say that this is a wonderful story. But I think that familiarity breeds a sort of contempt.

But I’ll tell you what else I think it breeds. I think it breeds a sense of carelessness. I think there’s a sense of carelessness that we have when we read this story. If contempt is the case then carelessness surely follows.

And I think that you can relate to this, because think about what the insurance agent tells us. He tells us that 52% of all accidents happen within five miles of a home. 77% of accidents happen within fifteen miles of home.

What does that tell you? It tells you that the more familiar your surroundings are, the more careless you are about them. And so you know you’re five miles from home. You know every stop sign, every light; you know every nook and cranny. And yet you have an accident because you’re careless about your driving in those places.

I think that’s the way we can be with a story like Jonah. We can be so careless that we can actually miss what the story is actually communicating, what it’s actually telling us.

And what I want to do is that I want to engage you with a new approach. I want to think about it from a different angle. Now I think in the past that I’ve done this before,

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but I want to throw something up on the board. And what I want to do is, I want to ask an immediate question. You’ll see the picture. I want you to tell me what it is that you see. And I’ll give you a choice and you can respond accordingly, okay? Are you ready? Are you set?

Transcriber’s Note: Jeff draws a picture of a woman.

Jeff: How many see an old woman? How many see a young woman? Most of you see the young woman. I’ll tell you what that tells me about you. *(Laughter)*

Ted: That we’re alive. *(Laughter)*

Jeff: I’ll tell you what it tells me. It tells me that each one of you has a built-in focus. What was the first thing that you men saw when you looked at that?

Don Bishop: The nose.

Jeff: Yeah. Some of you guys who saw the old woman saw the nose. But you guys that saw the young woman—

Ted: I saw the hair. *(Laughter)*

Jeff: You saw the hair. *(Laughter)* It’s all a matter of focus, isn’t it? Where did you focus first? Because think about it: When you’re the person that sees the young woman, and you say “I don’t see the old woman,” and you say, “How do you see it?”, they say, “Look right here, look right there. Look at the chin on the young woman!” Now they see that as a nose and they start pointing out the features. And all of a sudden it comes into focus for you. And the next thing you know, you see it. “Ah, I see it; I see a woman!” It’s a matter of where you’re focusing.

So the question I have for you is a very simple one. What’s your focus when you look at the book of Jonah? What are you focusing on?

Now when we ask that question I want to tell you what we should be answering. I want to tell you the question that we should be answering. This is a little bit of a “how to interpret the Bible” moment. What should we be focusing on? We should be focusing on the question: What does the text say? When we ask the question: What does the text actually say; what’s being said here?, then we have a leg up on what it is that we’re to be focused in on. What does the text actually say?

Now what *does* the text say? Does the text give us any indication, any clues, any hints about how we ought to be reading it? I think it does; let me give you one. There’s a brusque beginning in verse 2: “*Arise! Go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against it.*” Verse 3: “*But Jonah rose up to flee.*” God is saying, “Arise and go.” And Jonah arose to flee.

Now that’s an interesting beginning, isn’t it? It’s one of those beginnings that indicate to us that something is happening here that we need to pay attention to. And that is that this man is receiving a command to rise and go from the Lord, and he is rising to flee from God’s commandment.

Now I think that when you think about that, that is a good place to begin, a good place to focus on. And it doesn’t automatically jump us to a big fish, does it?

Let me put it a little more in perspective for you. This is a map, and there is Joppa. And he’s told to go to Nineveh which is 550 miles away. And instead he arises to go 2500 miles away to Tarshish.

Think about that. He would rather add two thousand extra miles to his trip. Why does he do that?

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You know, the question is: why do we disobey God? Why is it that we read something in Scripture and we go entirely in the opposite direction? That’s a good place to start when we think about Jonah, because what we’re thinking about here is a prophet who disobeyed.

Now I want you to think a little bit with me about this. Why flee? I mean, he’s a prophet. Think about this from the vantage point of what we know about prophets. God loves His prophets. They speak His word. They carry a sense of authority with them. Why is it that a prophet would flee from the word of God? That’s startling in and of itself. “Go and take this word to them.”

“No, I’m going in that direction.” Why is it that he does that? Well chapter 4 may provide a potential explanation for that. Why do you think that is? I think that when you think about Nineveh, Nineveh is a part of an empire that is rising. And I think the prophet knows this eventually.

Do you remember how Elisha goes to anoint the king of Syria? And he looks at the king of Syria and the king of Syria is getting all uncomfortable because Elisha is looking at him. And Elisha starts to break down in tears because he knows; he can see it; the Lord has revealed it to him. Even as he looks at this king he knows that this man is going to commit many atrocities against the people of Israel. And even as he sees that king he is weeping.

And the king doesn’t know why he’s weeping; the man doesn’t know why he is weeping. I wonder if there’s a little bit of that here. I wonder if there’s a little bit of (the fact) that Jonah knows that Nineveh is going to be a rising power and that it is going to take Israel into captivity at some point. I wonder if he knows that.

The text is silent about this and the Lord is silent about this. But I want you to think about this; let’s just pause for a minute. Regardless of whether he’s a prophet, is it ever justifiable to flee from the Lord? Is it ever justifiable to flee from the Lord and from what the Lord is asking us to do?

Let me put this in another way. Is there ever a legitimate reason to disobey a command of God? Now you know what I’m asking you. I’m asking you that when you open the Scriptures, is it ever legitimate to disobey a command of God?

Now I’m not talking about this. Some of you guys are going to say that He commanded them to offer sacrifices. I know how you guys are. (*Laughter*) We should not offer a sacrifice today. It’s legitimate to disobey that command. And I would say “Yes and Amen.” But there’s a legitimate reason to understand that this command should not be offered obedience to today and in this day and age.

So I’m talking about a legitimate command of God. Is it ever justifiable, is there ever a legitimate reason to disobey a command from the Lord? And you and I both know that the answer to that is no. It is never legitimate to obey a command from the Lord.

Don Maurer: Disobey.

Jeff: Disobey. (*Laughter*) It’s never legitimate. Now you and I both know that we do. And so I think that when you look at the book of Jonah, when we stare the book of Jonah in the face, one of the things that we’re coming to grips with is that we’re coming to grips with (the fact that) we’re very much like the prophet in more ways than we think. Yes?

Don Maurer: I was going to kind of elaborate on that, because you ask why a prophet would flee from the Lord. Well, why do any of us?: It’s the insanity of sin.

Jeff: Yeah.

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Don: We think in our insanity and our foolishness that sin will give us what we want, whatever it is—peace or fulfillment, or whatever. Lord, You’re not giving me that right now. It’s like Abraham and Sarah. Abraham and Sarah thought they could help God along with His promise by bringing Hagar into it. And we’re the same way.

Now it’s never justifiable to disobey a command of God, but it’s certainly humanly understandable. What if God asked some of us to go to the next Planned Parenthood meeting? How many of us would say, “I’m not going to go to that den of iniquity?”

Jeff: If God asked us to do that?

Don: Yeah, right.

Jeff: Why would God ask us to do that?

Don: Well I’m just giving a hypothetical example, Jeff.

Jeff: You’re giving a hypothetical example that doesn’t exist, Don. *(Laughter)*

Don: Right. That’s why it’s hypothetical! *(Laughter)*

Ted: It would be similar to God telling us to go to a Baptist church. *(Sighs and laughter)*

Jeff: Oh, ouch! I’ll tell you what. I want to tell you men a story.

Ted: Uh-oh!

Jeff: I once had a friend who took a spelling test. *(Laughter)*

Transcriber’s Note: Referring to an incident in high school that Don Maurer told the group about during the opening of the lesson.

Jeff: Now let me ask; Don raises an interesting question. Let me throw this on the table. Go back to Genesis chapter 22. And there God says to Abram, “Take your son, your only son, the son that you love, Isaac. And take him to a place I will show you, and there offer him on the mountain as a sacrifice.”

And what does Abraham do? Abraham obeys. And Abraham takes the knife in his hand even after he has prepared the wood on the altar. And he’s about ready to strike his son dead. And God speaks from heaven and says, “Whoa, stop! Hold on just a second there. Now I know.” Not that God didn’t know, but that’s the way God communicates to finite creatures. To me it gets to us on our level; he’s teaching Abraham something.

But my point is that philosophers have called this “the teleological suspension of the ethical,” that is that God suspends the ethical command that He gives in order to find out a different end with regard to Abraham. Now oftentimes philosophers use that as sort of a “what if” scenario. What if God commanded it?

It’s sort of like Don. What if God commanded you to go to a Planned Parenthood meeting?—something that He wouldn’t normally command, or something that we don’t think He would command because it would violate His ethical integrity.

Now I think—and I want you to know—that those kinds of examples—and I’m going to give you a Latin word to think about them so that you can process this,—but I think those kinds of examples today are hooley. *(Laughter)*

Ted: Hooley.

Jeff: Because God doesn’t do that to us today. God is not going to appear to you like He appeared to Abraham and tell you to do something that is ethically compromised. I would say this to you. If you men hear a voice in your head that tells you to do something that is outside of the bounds of Scripture, you better not do it, because if you belong to a Biblical church they’re going to discipline you, and should.

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So here’s the point. I think those kinds of exercises are good and have their place. But in a concrete situation like this one what I’m saying to you is this. I’m asking you, taking it for granted that we use the word of God as a basis for the revelation of God’s will in our lives, I’m asking you: Is it ever legitimate, is there ever a legitimate reason to disobey the word of God, a legitimate command of God? And I’m arguing no; it’s never legitimate. And what I want you to see in arguing that is that I want you to see the absolute relevance of Jonah to our lives.

Matt Reichart: And I agree with you. Don’t you think that the reason people would do that is because we believe that Scripture is complete, with no new revelation? God gives us the examples of the New Testament and the Old Testament; God doesn’t give us a new revelation. Even with Abraham He said to kill his firstborn son. And He said, “Stop.” So that was new revelation; He doesn’t do that. But there are people who say, “I just heard from the Lord,” and that’s not necessarily exactly true. “God told me that I should go ahead and do this “with that woman. And how can they justify that?

Jeff: Uh-huh. See, I totally—

Matt: They thought it was legitimate.

Jeff: Oh, sure! Always bring love into it. (*Laughter*) Everybody’s always going to bring a job, love, or what into it? Where do I live?

Don Bishop: When I think of Jonah’s disobedience, I think that one of the main reasons and one of the main areas where the church disobeys, and us as people, is God’s command to go into all the world and preach the gospel, making disciples. I think we’ve failed much in that. Going out, that’s too uncomfortable for me.

Jeff: Yeah. You know, I think that’s a legitimate point. I’m going to come back to you in just a second, Matt. I think this is a legitimate point. I think that when we ask the question in parallel fashion, for instance, how is it that we ought to understand this commandment to Jonah and apply that directly to us? And you’re right.

There’s a sense in which I think we have to be careful about applying Matthew 28 to every believer and I’ll tell you why. We have a tendency to do that. We are to go and make disciples. That’s what we have a tendency to say to believers. But then remember what that text says. It also says, “*baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.*” And not every believer has the authority to baptize people. That authority belongs to the offices of the church; it belongs to the ministerial office, right? So there’s a sense in which we even have to parse out with Matthew 28. Who is really responsible for the pieces and the parts here?

And I think Ephesians 4 helps us to understand that. The pastors equip people for ministry, and there’s an aspect where there is a full-bodied response to that Matthew 28 command. But you’re right. I think there is a sense in which we ask this question. Why aren’t we making disciples of the nations? This is indeed what Christ came to do when He ascended into heaven and His Father gave Him what He asked for on earth. He asked for the nations. And His Father in Daniel 7:13-14 gave Him the nations as an inheritance.

Transcriber’s Note: Daniel 7:13-14, ESV.

“I saw in the night visions.

And behold, with the clouds of heaven

There came One like a Son of Man.

And He came to the Ancient of Days

And was presented before Him.

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*And to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom,
That all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him.
His dominion is an everlasting dominion which shall not pass away,
And His kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.”*

Jeff: And so He says to His disciples, “Go therefore and disciple the nations.” So we’re not kept in the dark. There’s a failure on our part to do that in a faithful way.

But when we think that way, let me just modify our thinking a bit. We could think in that big global way and we can say to ourselves, “Yeah, we’ve failed.” But I think the more pressing question is how have I been faithful to that command? How have I been faithful in my day-to-day context? How have I been faithful in my family? How have I been faithful within my workplace? How have I been faithful within my community to do these things? I think that’s the question that we all have to ask ourselves when we stop and reflect on Jonah at this point. Thank you for bringing that up.

But what about this idea of continuing revelation? I think part of that is—and I would say this, Matt—you brought up the idea and so I’m going to stay with it. When you think about making a decision—

Transcriber’s Note: Jeff draws another picture of a woman.

Jeff: You’ve probably seen me do this before. The redeeming trait of this girl is that she has a long neck, just like the woman in the Song of Solomon. (*Laughter*) Too many curves.

Ted: You’ve got Mary; you’ve got Helen.

Jeff: You’ve got Mary, you’ve got Helen. And the question is who do I marry? And I don’t think the answer is that God tells me who I should marry. I think the answer is that I exercise wisdom because God has given me principles that I can utilize in making the decision.

What is the very first principle? The very first principle that I utilize is: is she a Christian? If I’m a Christian I’m only to marry in the Lord. So is she a Christian? So I ask that question.

Now that may knock Helen out. But I doubt it, because look at the neck on that girl! She’s got the Song of Solomon neck, right? (*Laughter*) But let’s say they’re both Christians. Then I have another question to answer. The other question to answer is: what do my parents think of her? Because I’m to honor my parents—commandment #5—I’m to honor my father and mother. I’m not to obey them but I am to honor them. Don’t look like that, Ted; you know that’s the truth. (*Laughter*)

Ted: You’ve got me thinking in a thousand directions.

Jeff: And so I go to them and I ask them. “What do you think?”, because it’s a fallacy to think that you don’t marry into the family. And she is marrying into your family. So it is only right for you to go and find out, just like it’s right for you to go to her parents and find out what they think of you. So you should ask your parents what they think of her. I think that parental issues are important.

What about Proverbs? “*With many counselors there is wisdom.*” So what do your friends think? Now don’t just ask the friends that you think are going to tell you “Yeah, you ought to marry her.”

“Why should I marry her?”

“Look at the neck on that girl!” (*Laughter*) That’s not the direction in which you ought to go.

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And then there is the issue of compatibility. I mean, this is an important thing. Look, I do not want a young man coming to my door and saying, “Mr. Stivason, I’d like to marry your daughter.”

“Well, let’s talk about that. Why is it that you’d like to marry her?”

“I am a believer and she is a believer, and I believe that’s the basis for a good relationship. And we’ll learn to love each other.”

“Well hit the bricks, pal!” (*Laughter*) Because guess what? I want somebody who is absolutely in love with my daughter, because do you know what? When you’re in love with someone, you’ll sacrifice for that person, and she’ll sacrifice for you. And I think that’s the basis for the Ephesians 5 thing: love and submission. I think that those aspects are there when there is compatibility. And part of that compatibility is love.

And so I think that in those kinds of things you make a decision. And I think you make wise decisions.

I’ll just tell you this. I’m going to take the wife and I’m going to throw her right under the bus. But she’ll be okay with that. Don’t tell her, Jordan. (*Laughter*) Last night my wife was talking to her dad and she was telling her dad about her decision. And he was talking to her about whether she was settled and stuff. And what she was saying was that she was saying that I had been talking to these people. And earlier that day she was telling me, “You know, I hear so-and-so’s voice when I think about this direction, and I hear so-and-so’s voice when I think about this direction.”

And my wife said to her dad,--without that background—she said to him, “I hear voices in my head and I am completely at ease and at peace.” (*Laughter*) And when she got off the phone I said, “You sounded like a quack!” (*Laughter*) “You sounded like you had voices in your head.”

She said, “I let her call them back.” (*Laughter*) But my point is that sometimes we have a way of expressing what we really mean as I am making a wise choice. We have a way of expressing it in the sense that we can talk about a voice in our heads. And we don’t really mean that. What we mean is that I’m making this wise decision, and this is how I’m making it.

Matt: I appreciate you explaining that. I was doing it in the context of men who are justifying an illicit relationship.

Jeff: Yeah.

Matt: They’re saying, “I hear God telling me this.” Or maybe it’s forgiveness. You made the observation that this could be the reason in chapter 4 why Jonah didn’t go. “I knew that You are gracious.” And he became angry.

Jeff: Yeah.

Matt: “*Is this not what I said while I was still in my country?*”

Jeff: Yeah.

Matt: So he knew the character of God, and he knew what God would do.

Jeff: Yeah.

Matt: So I think that if you run it backwards, this prophet knew that those in good standing were executed by these guys, and he had some anger and bitterness.

Jeff: Right.

Matt: But there were reasons that he didn’t like the Assyrians and didn’t want to see them forgiven.

Jeff: Well,--

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Matt: God commands us to forgive, but do we?

Jeff: Well let me go to the next point because this is along the lines of what you’re saying. Look at what Amos 3:7 says: “*For the LORD does nothing without revealing His secrets to His servants the prophets.*”

Think about this for a minute. You’ve got Elijah—sorry; I think it was Elijah; Elijah and the Shunamite woman. Is it Elijah or Elisha?

Ted: It’s monolithic. (*Laughter*)

Don Maurer: It’s Elisha.

Jeff: I’ve got my human computer up here. All right, it’s Elisha. Elisha is a strange bird anyway, right? But listen; I just love this story. Gehazi is standing there and the woman is right at the door. And he says, “What shall we give the woman who has been so kind to us?”

“I don’t know. She’s right there; why don’t you ask her?” (*Laughter*) Gehazi is the one who says, “How about a baby? She doesn’t have a child.” And he goes, “That’s a good idea. Next year.”

She says, “Oh, don’t tell me that, because I haven’t been able to conceive.” And she conceives and she gives birth to a son. And remember the story. The boy grows up. He’s in the field with his father. “*My head, my head!*” And he goes home and he dies in his mother’s arms. And then she packs up the donkey and she heads off to Mount Carmel. And she goes to Elisha and she says, “What gives?”

But this is the point. The point is that he sends Gehazi. He says, “Isn’t that the Shunamite woman?” And he sends Gehazi, and she pushes Gehazi out of the way.

And this is what Elisha says. He says, “*Let her come; the Lord has not revealed this to me.*” It’s like it’s an anomaly. Why? Because normally the Lord reveals His secrets to the prophets before He does things.

Now if we can take that on board here in this sense, is it unrealistic for us to think to ourselves that God revealed to Jonah that He was going to grant repentance to this group of wicked people? I don’t think that’s unrealistic to think at all. And so here is a prophet who probably isn’t speculating about what God will do, but probably understands what God will do. He probably has a very good sense that God is going to forgive these people.

Now that repentance is only going to last a year, because we’re going to see in another Biblical book in not a year—sorry; a hundred years from now,—that the place falls. So the repentance doesn’t last forever. But it’s genuine, and it’s something that Jonah doesn’t want to see happen. I think that’s the part that we need to take on board. He likely knew it and he fled.

Mike Davis: I find verse 2 really interesting, where the second half says, “Preach to it because its wickedness has come up before Me.” So it makes me wonder if there were righteous people in Nineveh praying.

Jeff: Sure.

Mike: It’s speculation. But when He said that “it has come up before Me,” it’s a matter where we are to keep praying, to keep asking.

Jeff: It reminds you of Abraham and Sodom, right? His prayers have come up.

Mike: It almost seems like there was somebody who prayed.

Jeff: Maybe yes; very much so.

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Jordan Obaker: On the topic you mentioned before this, I don't believe that God audibly speaks to us anymore.

Jeff: That's right.

Jordan: But the Scriptures say that wisdom comes from God.

Jeff: Yes, that's right.

Jordan: And we're told to pray to God.

Jeff: Right.

Jordan: We tell our desires to Him and we expect that He answers those prayers.

Jeff: Right.

Jordan: So when you're making a decision,--

Jeff: Yes?

Jordan: And you're feeling at peace with the decision that you're making,--

Jeff: Yes.

Jordan: Is it fair to say that God is leading me in this? Though I'm not hearing voices, is it fair to say? The other night my wife saw a friend of hers. And her friend said, "Yeah, God told me to do x, y or z."

So I asked her specifically what God told her to do. "Can you tell me more about that?" And when she was done explaining it, I was getting behind the fact that because of prayer, a sermon, the counsel of friends, ultimately she is feeling that the Lord is leading her to do this.

Jeff: Yeah.

Jordan: I'm just curious. How do you view people who say that? Is that what they mean? Or do we have to be careful?

Jeff: Yeah. I have a tendency to default like you. When somebody says "The Lord told me to do this," I have a tendency to think to myself that this is a culmination of things. Like you said, I read the Scripture and it says to be kind and generous, or whatever. I've talked to friends. They say, "Yeah, go ahead and do this." I know that story; my heart goes out to them.

In all of these things I do think that there is an unsystematizable aspect to the Christian life that we need to keep in mind though. For instance, have you ever had that feeling, or have you ever had that experience where it's not an audible voice, but you feel like you have \$20 and you need to give it to that person? And so you walk over and you give him that \$20. And that person says, "I needed \$20. Literally I didn't have \$20 and I needed \$20." Do you know what I mean? I think that's the unsystematizable sort of governance of the Spirit in our lives that we just can't put our fingers on. The Spirit blows where it will.

My own view is that sometimes people talk about the Lord speaking to them. "The Lord told me to do this." I think probably not. I think that what you probably had was an unexplainable urge to give away your money to that particular person. *(Laughter)* But I don't think that's the same as what you would categorize as revelation.

Jordan: Right.

Jeff: I think the Puritans might have talked about. John Owen certainly talked this. And Sinclair Ferguson will sometimes enlarge on this when he talks about illumination. The Spirit illuminates this text in broader contexts

. And we have a tendency to think of illumination as being very, very narrow. That is to say that when I'm studying Scripture I come to this new insight. I go, "Oh, I finally

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understand that!”, and I didn’t understand that before. And we say that’s the illumination of the Spirit at work.

And I would say to you that sometimes caffeine does that for me. (*Laughter*) And so the question is, is it caffeine or is it the Holy Spirit?

And I think the reason why we need to be careful of that kind of narrowing in on illumination is because it doesn’t do justice to what the Spirit actually does when He illuminates the Word in contexts that are a little bit more broad, like a prompting or something like that. And so those are the unsystematizable things about the Christian life that remind me that I can’t grab the tail of this thing called the Christian life and then hold onto it and explain it all.

It’s like C.S. Lewis used to say. He used to say, “I hate defending the Christian faith, because when I defend the Christian faith, if I win I feel like my argument is my foundation for the Christian faith. And I know the Christian faith is so much deeper than anything I can possibly offer that would be an argument for the Christian faith.” And so Lewis always said that the most dangerous place to be is the place where we become the explainers of something, as if we understand all the parts of it.

Ted: C.S. Lewis did that all the time.

Jeff: C.S. Lewis did that all the time. (*Laughter*) Yes, that’s right.

Ted: “Mere Christianity” was broadcast in England right after the Second World War; it has become a classic.

Jeff: Yeah, and it has. But do you know what? I just recently listened to *The Problem of Pain* and *Mere Christianity*. Thought-provoking books, fascinating stuff, but some real errors in those books. You know what I mean? They are not books that you just want to hand out to anybody. They are great books in many ways. But he says, “Hey, I’m not a theologian. I just know that theologians aren’t doing what they should be doing, writing about this sort of thing. So I’m trying to fill the gap here. So be careful about what I say at some points.” And I would say that’s probably a good warning, right? Yes?

Don Maurer: I know I’m getting a little farther afield here. But when we talk about—

Jeff: You don’t say! (*Laughter*)

Don: So we talk about the Lord telling us this or that. I think that you’re right on when you say that sometimes the Christian life is unsystematizable because, for example, how did you know that you had the inward call to be a pastor?

Jeff: That’s right.

Don: Or how did the session discern that? Or a missionary, or whatever?

Jeff: That’s right.

Don: The Lord does work. And I can say that I am sure, as far as I know, that the Lord called me to do this or that and act accordingly. There you go.

Jeff: Well, that’s absolutely true. I know that when I was extended an invitation to go to Belarus about ten years ago that I had as much peace about going to Belarus as I had about going to Gibsonia. But I know what anxiety is, right? And I know I wasn’t anxious. I had no anxiety and I was at peace with it. And so that’s unsystematizable; that’s the peace of the Spirit that passes our understanding. Yes?

Ted: Jeff, we just spent six weeks with Bob Cummings, and his subject was discernment.

Jeff: Well then, why are you asking me questions? (*Laughter*)

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Ted: I found it confusing. And maybe we’re coming back to the same issue: how we discern whether it’s the Lord’s voice or not. I mean, if the Lord says it here, there’s no question.

Jeff: That’s correct.

Ted: As long as it’s rightly understood.

Jeff: That’s right.

Ted: Okay, that’s the most authoritative. But what’s the next level down from that, maybe not as authoritative? And those of us who have a strong doctrine of the sinfulness of men tend to be skeptical about people who say, “The Lord told me.”

Jeff: Sure; right.

Ted: On the other hand there are those who are more optimistic about the human will. They read the New Testament and they say, “Gee whiz, God was speaking to people all the time.”

Jeff: Yeah.

Ted: And so the thing I found missing in brother Bob’s sharing—and I’m interested to know what you thought—is the role of the church. I always have to bring us back to that. Protestants have such an aversion to this, and I’m a Protestant.

Jeff: Yeah.

Ted: When you get godly counsel, when you submit yourself to the authority of the leadership of the church, you’re in a really safe place.

Jeff: Right.

Ted: That doesn’t mean that the church and the counsel don’t err. But you just put another lip together and—

Jeff: A multiplicity of counselors.

Ted: Starting with people in our church. “Well, what about this?” Go and talk to the pastor about it. Start with that. Start with the elders of the church.

Jeff: Yes, I think that’s wise.

Ted: I really don’t think it’s that difficult of an issue.

Jeff: No, and I think that’s wise, and I think what you’re saying is wise. And I would incorporate this idea of seeking the counsel of the church. But I also think that the church has to have a proper understanding of their own counsel. I’ll give you a for instance. There was a time where we actually went to a family and told them that we thought “what you’re doing is not a wise direction to go.” And we said that as a session. The decision that you’re making is not a wise one.” And they went ahead and did it anyway, and it proved not to be a wise one.

And so what we did was this. We didn’t say, “I told you so!” What we did was that we tried to gather around them and help them because they had stepped into a mess.

Ted: A mess.

Jeff: And so we didn’t see that as “they disobeyed our counsel!” No, we thought that they went ahead and made an unwise decision when we tried to give them counsel. And I think that informal shepherding is what is lacking in Protestantism, because—

Ted: Even a sense of the church. We’re so scared of the church as an organization.

Jeff: Yeah.

Ted: Because we know that if we do that we’re going to end up being just like the Catholics and selling indulgences.

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Jeff: Yeah. But I also think that the Protestant church is afraid of losing people. If we actually tell them what we think, they might leave and go elsewhere, right?

Ted: Jeff, I'd like to share a story of an experience I had about trying to discern something.

Jeff: That's fine.

Ted: I was in line at PNC Bank about a year ago to deposit a check from a client. I now know that I can actually take a photo with that phone. *(Laughter)* At the time it was a great revelation. But anyway—

Jeff: Just so you know, that's not a revelation, Ted. *(Laughter)*

Ted: The cashier said, “You know, you can do that on your phone.” So anyway I'm in line, and the guy in front of me is in the construction field. And he is very patient dealing with the teller because he can't get his check cashed. And also at the same time his whole hand is shot. And the inclination I had is that I wanted to bring a little peace to the situation.

Jeff: That's right; sure.

Ted: So he turns around and visits with the teller going back and forth, trying to get the cash checked; he just got paid for the job. And I started talking to him. “How's it going?”

And he says, “Well, I'm just trying to get this check cashed. And then I said, “Did something happen to your hand?”

He said, “Yes. The saw jumped back at me and it cut off my fingers. *(Sighs)* And his problem was not so much the check; it was his pain. I said, “What are you taking for it?”

He said, “I'm taking all the drugs I can take. I'm just in a lot of pain.” And I mean, with that kind of exchange you're always thinking: Is this a con? And I came to the conclusion that it was not. Maybe I was wrong. And so I had a strong impression. I wanted to encourage that man in some fashion. Forget the money; I wanted to encourage him. And I said, “I'll pray for you. God is going to do something in your life.”

And the Lord says, “That's good. But maybe you can do something else.” So I thought: Maybe I need to give him some money. And then the question is: How much?

And then I thought: \$500. And the Lord says, “That's pretty stingy.” So I thought: \$1000. And I had a sense that that was right. I went to the ATM machine at the bank and pulled out a thousand dollars, and I put it into an envelope and I just handed it to him.

And I said, “You know, let this be the time when the Lord wants to do something in your life. I want you to be encouraged.” And then I left.

After I left I felt that I had just been conned, or whatever the word is. I never felt completely at peace about it. But he was so distracted. He was trying to get his check cashed, and he's in a lot of pain. And I had it there.

Brave Man: How did you know to give it to him?

Ted: I said, “Lord, let him see it and let him know that it was God, that there is a God.

Brave Man: Amen.

Ted: But was that the Lord's voice? Was it an impression? It was certainly an impression.

Matt: I think you forget something. We're not alone, Ted, we're not alone. The Holy Spirit is a powerful Person. He's with us, and He controls our pocketbooks.

Jeff: I think those are the unsystematizable kinds of promptings.

Ted: *(Unclear)*

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Jeff: No. But you’re leaving the bank and saying, “Was I conned?” I mean, here’s the thing you have to ask yourself. You have to ask yourself: Was it a prompting or was it just human compassion, right? Or was it both? Or was it a prompting where he was distracted and not recognizing the generosity of the gift?

Ted: It was in the envelope. He had no idea.

Jeff: And you have to ask yourself. Is the reason I feel conned because I didn’t get a response because he didn’t see it? Do you see what I mean? There are all kinds of things that you have to ask yourself. I don’t think it’s an easy one-to-one.

Ted: No.

Ted: *(Unclear)*

Jeff: And I think that what you have to do is this; here’s how I think of this, because I’m a cessationist. I don’t believe that God is going to give us more revelation.

Ted: Amen.

Jeff: But I believe that there is a Holy Spirit who is living and active in our lives.

Matt: Amen.

Jeff: So here’s how I look at it. I look at it and I say to myself that I respond to promptings because I think the Spirit is living in me. I respond to promptings, and so I may do something—this, that, or the other—and then I forget about it, because I’m like you. I know that there are times when I’ll walk away and go, “I don’t know about this guy.” No, it’s done. *(Laughter)* Let the Lord deal with it, right?

But I do know this; I do want to say this as we close. My hand is really hurting!
(Laughter)

Ted: Let’s give him a thousand dollars. *(Laughter)* We’re just going to pray for you.
(Laughter) And that should be sufficient. *(Laughter)*

Ted: I want you to know that I’ve had a really good time with you. *(Laughter)* I’m really glad to be back. Thank you.

Matt: This is to encourage you guys in my own journey. So I spoke to the Lord early this morning. If we submit ourselves to the Word on a consistent basis, God can use that. The Holy Spirit can use that to speak to us even where we are right now. He helps us to look at our priorities so that we can know what we need to do.

Jeff: Yes.

Matt: Without turning to the Bible I don’t have anything to do with regard to my calling and my responsibilities. And then all He has to do is to confirm them. I need to walk in obedience and He confirms them.

Jeff: Well let me pray with you and then we’ll go. Father, thank You for the day and for the time You’ve given us to be together. Thank You for Your word and for Your Holy Spirit, and for the fellowship of the Christian life. And thank you for the morning Bible study on Fridays. Lord, we just pray that You’ll continue to bless us and go with us day by day, and use us in the lives of others for Your good and glory and for their good. And Lord, we pray these things, all of them, in Christ’s name. Amen.

Don Maurer: And Father, thank You for bringing Jeff back.

Brave Men: Amen. *(Applause)*