

The Hard Road By Bryan Loritts

If you have your Bibles, if you could meet me and Jonah, chapter one this morning, and as you're turning there once again, let me say thank you so much for the invitation to have me here and to share with you my deep convictions from the scriptures. And I personally was challenged at a find and encouraged as a result of the time spent here. And what a privilege it's been getting to know some of you and being able to dialogue with some of you about the deeper issues of life.

Also, thanks again to Dr Cooke, to Ron Hafer and his lovely wife, and to the rest who played an important role in inviting me here. It is a homecoming of sorts. I have so treasured this school and its investment that it's made in my life. To Pastor Wayne Cooper, I want you to stand Pastor Cooper. He is the pastor of the Lincoln Avenue Baptist Church in Pasadena, California, God has used him ten years, you've been there past Cooper to deposit greatly into the lives of those there and abroad.

And I trust from time to time, if you think of Pasadena, you would remember Pastor Cooper in your prayers. I wrestled and labored, really as to what to share with you all. And normally, I'd like to end these events with with a great kind of celebratory sendoff. And yet yesterday, as I was listening to Francis talk and that one illustration he gave just really riveted all of our attention. He talks about his daughter, 13 month old, grabbing a hold of her hair and trying to pull it out and at the same time crying and screaming. But she won't let go in how she was really making a

mess of her life and him saying, as the dad, I want to do something to help you. And then the punchline that there's no greater joy than walking a surrendered life that is following the commandments of God. I love his phrasing there that the Bible is not a bunch of half truths, but a bunch of GetUp's. I don't just have to obey, but I get to obey and the blessing that comes with obedience.

And I want to follow up on that. And I want to look at not very inspiring topic, but a helpful topic that comes straight out of the life of Jonah. I want to talk about sin. Around the fall of every year, this time, my mom would make me and my brother and sister stand in line and she would make us take the most disgusting medicine known to man. If you have not taken this, count yourself blessed. And among the fortunate, it's a little something called cod liver oil.

Anybody here ever taken cod liver oil like you? You were abused as well. Biola offers counseling and you can get some help. And I remember just how awful this stuff was. I'm not I'm not overseeing I'm getting a lot of disgusting things in my life. I'm eating bushmeat in Ghana, West Africa and other stuff. And nothing in my mind compares to cod liver oil. It is disgusting. And I figured out at a young age, if you hold your breath, you know, it would kind of blunt the taste.

But then, sure enough, you're sitting in class about second period and you burp in cod liver oil comes up in man and you start, you know, that bitter beer face commercial. That's kind of the face that I'd have and I'd get the pop locking and it would just look awful. And everybody's

asking me what in the world is going on with you? And I'm like, do that. Took cod liver oil? And they're like, man, your mom hates you.

And I'm like, Yeah, awful. I remember one time I'm standing in line there at our house with my other siblings and my mom is administering this cod liver oil. And I finally I just couldn't contain myself. I said, Mom, do you hate us? What in the world? Why are you making us take this stuff? And I'll never forget what she said. She'd say, Son, this is what I'd call preventative medicine. It may not taste good. But it's good for you.

And when we talk about sin this morning, it may not taste good, but I believe that there's some lessons that we're going to learn from Jonah's life, some mistakes that he made that I believe by the spirit of God are going to help us critically in our journey with God in this thing called sanctification. I want to talk this morning about the hard road. Let's pray.

Father. Thank you for your grace and your goodness. Thank you for this worship team that has led us in song for this dear lady that came to us from Africa this morning to sing God, that is are our hearts cry. We want our lives to count and we want to make a difference in this land. Show us what part we play. And yet, Father, we do pray that we would be yielded vessels who do not tolerate sin in our lives. My heart's broken as I read the Banas statistics that pretty much reveal that there is no real difference between how Christians live as it relates to non Christians. And yet, Father, you've called us to be wholly the idea of holy is the idea of being set apart that there is to be a distinctive difference about our lives?

One of the drawbacks of postmodern culture is wanting to be able to relate with everybody and to pretty much say we're all the same. And yet, Father God, as I study the scriptures, there is to be a distinctive aroma that arises from the follower of Jesus Christ because we serve the God of the empty tomb. You've given us your spirit, and because of that, we're different. That is why Paul would tell the Corinthians, do you not know that your bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit?

We are different. Help us to walk in holiness knowing that we can attain or achieve that in our own strength. We need your spirit. So organ, as I've said many times before. So once again, I do pray that you would stand in my body and think with my mind and speak with my tongue. Those things you would have us no say and do challenge us deeply. Lord God, may there be a fresh renewal and recommitment among this community of faith to walk in holiness and newness of life. Descend among us this morning, we pray. Jesus name, Amen.

In 1940, a book was released that would have a major sociological impact among these United States and abroad, it was a book written by an African-American, by the name of Richard Wright entitled *Native Son*. If you have not read that book or you if you have not seen the movie, I would encourage you to do so. The central character of Richard Wright's book, *Native Son*, is an inner city African-American youth by the name of Bigger Thomas.

As the book begins to unfold, it is quite readily apparent that bigot Thomas is the poster child of hopelessness and despair every day for bigger Thomas, his life seems to be a struggle for his very survival and existence as he and his mother and siblings live in a tiny, rat infested apartment

there in Chicago. One day, though, the light begins to crack on his existence when he's offered a job by a suburban white couple by the name of the Daltons to be a valet of sorts. He makes his way to their suburban Chicago home and he gets there. And his first responsibility is to drive around town. That evening, his first day at work, they're college age daughter Mary and her boyfriend, who happens to be a communist. So for that evening, they drive around as a bigger watch as Mary Dalton and her boyfriend get drunk. Finally, he drops off the boyfriend and it is two o'clock in the morning and this is not a Kodak moment.

Bigger Thomas pulls up in this all white suburban Chicago home and he gets there and he realizes that it is two o'clock in the morning and he and African-American youth is with a drunk college age white girl. What does he do? He decides that what he will do is he will do the noble thing and carry this inebriated Mary up the stairs and tuck her into her bed. As he's tucking her in, though, the door begins to open up to the bedroom and they're standing in the doorway is Mary's blind mother, Mrs. Dalton. Bigger's heart begins to pound in race. What does he do? The only thing he can think to do is to take the pillow and put it over this drunken Mary's face in order to keep her quiet. Mary's mom is calling out, hoping that she would respond. But all she can sense is alcohol in the room. She figures Mary is drunk, and after a few moments of standing there, Mrs. Dalton closes the door and leaves bigger.

Now is relieved. All is well. He thinks so. Now he turns to this Mary Ann, whom he had decided to try to keep quiet. He removes the pillow and discovers she's dead. He was so concerned about keeping her quiet that he accidentally murdered her in this now unfortunate event sets off an

unfortunate chain of events in which Bigger Thomas digs himself deeper and deeper into the hole of despair. He decides to burn her body there in the coal burning furnace.

He then decides that he would extort some money from this rich couple by forging a ransom note. And you step back after reading this novel. And one of the things that strikes you it is one of the subtle messages of Richard Wright's novel. And it is this life becomes unnecessarily complicated. When you and I walk in sin and disobedience. Life becomes unnecessarily complicated when you and I walk in sin and disobedience. This is not only a theme of Richard Wright's wonderful novel, but it is the theme of the scriptures that when you and I walk in sin and disobedience, life becomes unnecessarily complicated.

We see this in the book of numbers. When the twelve spies come back to the nation of Israel, ten of them say, absolutely no way, we cannot take this land. The people are too big, the walls are too fortified. There is no way we can do it. So the people decide. Instead of listening to Joshua and Caleb and trusting God by faith, they decide to go with the report of the ten spots. Because of that, they would all be barred from the Promised Land.

They would find out that life becomes unnecessarily hard when you and I choose to walk and sin and disobedience or take Moses. Moses was told by God Moses speak to the rock. But he was so frustrated. The people that Ensign and rebellion, instead of speaking to the rock, he struck the rock and was barred from the promised land. Moses could tell you that life becomes unnecessarily complicated when you and I walk in sin disobedience or take David. David committed adultery with Bathsheba and murdered her husband, Uriah.

It is believed by many scholars that between the time David sinned and the time he confessed, one year went by. Of that year David writes in Psalm 32 that his bones grew old and his strength was sapped. As in the heat of summer, David would say in so many words, my life became unnecessarily complicated when I walked in. Sin and disobedience here. Now this summary statement from the writer of Proverbs when he said in Proverbs Chapter 13, The way of transgressors is hard. Not only do the scriptures attest to this friend's. But life attests to this.

My God, sister several years ago called me up and said there is something she needed to talk to me about and we met there at the Olive Garden there in Manhattan Beach. And while we were sitting there, she made several statements to me. She said one, Bryan, I want you to know I'm pregnant. Two, I'm having an abortion. And three, there's nothing you can do about it. I begged. And I pleaded with her to not do this, she went ahead and did it anyway. And about a year ago we were talking and she confessed in a moment of emotional vulnerability. She says, Bryan, there's not a time that goes by when I don't see some seven or eight year old child and I'm filled with grief thinking that that could have been my child that I killed.

I've passed a friend of mine who, after years of lying to his congregation, was removed from his post and is now struggling to put the pieces of his life back together. He could tell you my life became unnecessarily complicated because of poor choices that I made. I could tell you friends of mine who ventured out into the far country, had kids out of wedlock and are now having to visit their children on weekends, pay child support, they can tell you my life became unnecessarily complicated because of some poor choices that I made. I could tell you another

friend, not acquaintance, friend of mine who ventured out into the far country, made some horrible choices and is now spending 63 years in jail without the possibility of parole because of some poor choices that he made.

I can tell you, listen to me, Biola, I can tell you by personal testimony. That when you walk in sin and disobedience, life becomes unnecessarily complicated. July 3rd, 1999, I walked down the aisle and married my beloved bride, Corey. We had abstained from each other, but I had made some horrible choices previously in my season of singleness, got involved in periods of sexual immorality. And every time I'd get a cold. Or the flu. There's a little voice in the back of my mind that would say, could this be AIDS? The unnecessary headaches and worries that I was burdened with because I chose to walk in sin and disobedience. Hear me Biola this morning. When we choose as a way of life to walk in sin and disobedience, life becomes unnecessarily complicated.

Jonah can testify, Jonah, because of some horrible choices he made to not obey Christ. Listen to what happens. He encounters a storm, is thrown overboard, goes to the bottom of the ocean, swallowed by a great fish, all of which could have been avoided if he would have just obeyed.

I want to look at his sin this morning. And I think there's several things that we can learn about Jonah Sin as a ghost, a spiritual cod liver oil that will help us in our journey with Christ. Look with me, Jonah. Chapter one, verse one. Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah, the son of Amortise saying, arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it for their evil has come up before me. Verse three. But Jonah rose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the

Lord. He went down to Japan and found a ship going to Tarshish, so he paid the fare and went on board to go with them to Tarshish away from the presence of the Lord. As our text opens up, there's every indication that Jonah clearly heard the word of the Lord. God, says, Jonah, I am calling you to go to Nineveh.

Nineveh is due east from where Jonah is. And yet instead of him going due east, Jonah decides that he will literally go in the opposite direction to Tarshish. Some scholars believe that's on the far west coast shores of Spain. He decides to board a vessel and go in the opposite direction. There is every indication that God had spoken clearly to Jonah, that Jonah had clearly heard the word of the word of God, and that Jonah clearly made a decision to go against the will and way of God.

If you are friends, to do a study and you were to beg the question, what is the essential nature and teaching on sin? As we study the scriptures, you would make an interesting observation. You would realize that some 900 times in the Bible, the word for sin is used. It is used in Hebrew. The primary word is the Hebrew word Shut-off and the Greek the primary Greek word is Humar Toño. Both of these words, Schottenheimer, Tarnow are used, combines some 900 times.

And watch this now they both mean here it is to miss the mark, to miss the mark. But it's not what you think. The idea of missing the mark is the idea of an archer who gets his his bow and pulls back and aims at a target. But the idea of missing the mark, we would think, is that this archer is trying to aim at the right target, lets it go, and it just happens to miss that is not the biblical idea to miss the mark. If this is the target, God wants us to shoot at holiness and his

righteousness. The idea of to miss the mark means this. It is the idea of willfully aiming and shooting at the wrong target so that the very essence of sin, when you boil it down, is willful disobedience against God.

Came home a couple months ago, walked in the house, and my wife was spit man. She said, you need to go get that older son of yours. Whoa, whoa, whoa. I just walked in the house. What in the world are you talking about? That oldest boy of yours is on my last nerve. My wife said where I thought he was our child. And, you know, he's your child today so what happened? She said we were in the bathroom and me and that oldest boy of yours, we were in the bathroom and he kept flushing the toilet and flushing the toilet and flushing the toilet and flushing the toilet. And finally I said, Quentin, stop. I said, what did he do? She said, That oldest boy of yours looked at me with a smile on his face and flush the toilet: Willful.

You know, we need to stop using the phrase that so-and-so fell into sin as if sin was some pothole that we didn't see and just kind of slipped off into it. My experience, Biola, is when we sin, we walk into it with our eyes wide open. Driving down the street, someone cuts you off in your flesh, says, bless that person in sign language. Get back at them. Spirit says, don't do it, but we do it anyways, wilful. Late at night, Spirit says, don't go to that website. But we do it anyways. And a small group, Flesche says, share that juicy piece of information, Spirit says don't do it gossip. But we do it anyways, nine point nine times out of ten Biola, when we sin, we walk into it with our eyes wide open. Wilful.

There's something else I want to show you about Jonah's sin though, not only was it willful, but look at what the text says in verse three: Jonah rose to flee to Tarshish. Underline this phrase: from the presence of the Lord. He went down to Jopa and found his ship going to Tarshish. So he paid the fare and went on board to go with them to Tarshish. Then look at this phrase that is repeated again, away from the presence of the Lord.

The writer of this narrative wants you to understand that Jonah's destination wasn't so much Tarshish as it was away from the presence of the Lord. Jonah says, God, I hear your word, but now I'm trying to get on board this ship because I want to go away from where you are. Jonah, did you not read Jonah, Psalm 139 which was available to you then? Which David said, Where can I go from the presence of the Lord? And he goes on to say, in so many words, nowhere. Jonah, did you miss the lesson in Bible school when they talked about the omnipresence of God? There is no place you can go where God does not exist.

Here's the second thing I want you to see about sin sin, when you boil it down, is it just willful but it's foolish. Sin is foolish. I love with Chuck Swindell says about sin. Chuck Swindle says all sin is temporary insanity. All sin is temporary insanity. Several years ago, there's a wide receiver for the Carolina Panthers. His name was Rae Carruth. I don't know if you remember Rae Carruth. Rae Carruth was a wide receiver for the Carolina Panthers and was making a lot of money, making millions of dollars. At the same time, Rae Carruth gets his girlfriend pregnant and decides that he does not want to pay child support.

So even though he's making millions of dollars, gets his girlfriend pregnant, doesn't want to have to pay child support, Rae Carruth decides, here's what I'll do. I will have her murdered. Very bright. Rae Carruth. He hired some men to shoot her and to kill her. And he decides that not only is he going to entrust these men to shoot and kill her, but he wants to tag along to see and make sure they get the job done right. So he tags along well. One thing leads to another. They end up shooting this girl and the FBI finds out that Rae Carruth was involved.

They start chasing Rae Carruth. Where does Rae Carruth decide to hide? He doesn't decide to go to Africa or Mexico or Canada, but Ray Ray decides that he will hide in Nashville, Tennessee. Now, I should trust that I would never do anything like that. But if you ever hear the FBI on my tail, I should hope I do not have the fullest sense to hide in Nashville, Tennessee. Not only does he choose to hide in Nashville, Tennessee, but he chooses to hide in the trunk of his car. Ray must have been the most ignorant something at hide and go seek. I mean, there you are counting and you're at the tree and read the signs. He's just going to hide on the other side of the tree. Foolish.

Sin, when you boil it down, is foolish. I do a lot of traveling Biola. A lot of speaking in different places in my line of work, I am not just one major shift away from the unemployment line, I am one rumor away. The temptations are real, being away from my wife, let me say this as tactfully as I can. As a man, I feel the normal physiological yearnings of manhood. I think that was poetic enough [audience laughter]. I miss my wife. And there are times when I'm tempted. Tempted to order that movie on TV that's filled with pornography. Tempted to go and have the one night stand. Thousands of miles away from home, she may never find out.

You know what I do that helps me out Biola, I've got to talk to myself and so I'll check into the hotel room and one of the things I will do after I put my bags down is I'll take out my Bible and I will sit down on my Bible, a picture of my family. And I'll start talking to myself. And I'll say these boys, Quentin, Miles and Jayden are counting on you. My kids assume that I will be faithful to their mother. And then I'll say to myself, Bryan, are you willing to trade in your wife, your kids, your ministry, for a few fleeting moments of pleasure? Is an eight second orgasm worth visiting your kids on the weekends? Sin, when you boil it down, is foolishness.

There's one more thing I want you to see about Sin.. Jonah decides that he is going to willfully disobey God and he's going to get on this vessel and he's going to flee from the presence of God. But notice something, if you read it too fast, you'll miss it. It says that he went down middle of verse three to Joppa and found a ship going to Tarshish. Look at this next phrase, don't miss it. So he paid the fare. There was literally a cost involved to his sin.

Biola, whenever we sin, there is always, always a cost involved. I remember when I lived out here, my wife and I just got married and I had a few extra coins in my pocket and I decided I was going to buy some shirts, needed some shirts. I hate malls, but I was going to, you know, go to this mall at the Beverly Center right off of La Cienega there in Los Angeles. And so I remember walking into this one store at the Beverly Center and I saw some beautiful shirts and I loved them.

And these things were calling my name. But, you know, with me, I'm pretty frugal and pretty cheap guy. One of the first things I always do is to check the price tag. But I went to these shirts to check the price tag and realized there was no price tag. That should have warned me. Are these shoes? These shirts are beautiful and I'll just go ahead and pick them up and buy them. And if it's a little bit more than what I budgeted, that's fine. And so I took these three shirts that were beautiful, they were gorgeous. And I took them there to the counter there. And the woman rang it up. And she says that'll be about \$619, sir.

At that moment, I had a choice to make by the shirts and at the very least sleep on the couch for the next several weeks or swallow my pride and put them back. I put them back as I was driving away. It struck me. Isn't that how the enemy works? He shows you the beautiful shirts of opportunity, the beautiful woman. The beautiful, whatever it may be, but he never shows you the cost. Does it show you the cost of a marriage? Does it show you the price tag of a lost reputation? Never shows you cost. Friends. Sin always oversells and always underdelivered, always promises more than it delivers, scriptures are clear, Biola, that there's a cost to sin. Galatians, six, tells us that whatever we do we will read Hebrews Chapter 10 tells us that if we go on sinning willfully, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins. In fact, James Chapter one. And first, John tells us that there is even a sin that leads onto death.

Scholars debate on what that sin may be. I think the scriptures are intentionally ambiguous to refer to pretty much communicate: It doesn't matter. Don't fool around with that, there comes a point when Daddy Abba Father says, I've had enough. And he'll take some believers out. But there's something else here. Jonah boarded the vessel, paid the fare, seeking to get away from the

presence of the Lord by going to Tarshish, notice, if you will, that Jonah never makes his final destination. Jonah never gets to where he was hoping to go.

Sin, my friends, cheats you. It never takes you to where you think you want to go. Isn't that the nature of addictions, some people can't cope with the problems and the pressures of life, so they turn to drugs or they turn to alcohol and they think, if I can just escape this problem, pressure packed reality by by drinking or by getting high, that'll solve my problems. And so they try to take a trip to Tarshish by getting drunk or getting high, and then they come back down to the same reality they left and then they go back to getting drunk and getting hot. I want to come back, back and forth, back and forth, back and forth until they end up like Jonah, strung out at the bottom of the ocean, never really experiencing what they long for.

I've seen that in some girls, some women. Their daddy wasn't there for them emotionally or physically or both. So they think that in order for them to get what their soul's really looking for if they only gave their bodies to a man. And that will be it. So they lay down with this man hoping to get with their souls long before he gets up and leaves and they go from one man to the next to the next until they look at their lives and they're used up, never really experiencing what they were longing for. Sin cheats you.

Well, enough of the doom and gloom Biola. Let's get some hope. Jonah decides to run away and sin, but God says, Jonah, I love you too much to leave you. Verse four, God shows up in the most unusual way, says the Lord hurled a great wind upon the sea. Translation, God sent the storm. This storm was an accidental or coincidental. It was providential. God says, Jonah, I love

you too much to let you live in sin. I'm coming to get you. This is what we would call the discipline of the Lord. Hebrews Chapter 12 tells us that whom the Lord loves, he disciplines the idea of discipline is not punishment, but it is correction. It is to take you off of the path of rebellion and to put you on to the path of holiness and righteousness. And the Bible says that whom the Lord loves, that one of the ways you know, you are his child is that he disciplines you.

So you may be saying, well, Bryan, I'll be quite honest with you, I'm living in sin and nothing's happening to me, that means one of two things. One, it could mean, praise God, he's giving you time to repent. But if you don't repent, the discipline's coming or two. It could mean you're not his child.

My father tells the story of the time when he was 12 years old, he stole some jewelry. I had never stolen anything before I stole some jewelry, brought it home, hid it in his sock drawer, and a few moments later went downstairs where his dad was, his dad had gotten home early off of work. Later on that evening, the police showed up at his house, knocked on the door, my grandfather, my dad's dad opened the door, was surprised to see the policeman and said, what are you guys doing here? The policeman said, Mr. Leyritz, we have every reason to believe that your son, Crawford, stole some chains, some jewelry. My grandfather looked at my dad and said, boy, is this true? My dad said, "No, it's not. In fact, even if they want to check my room, they can check it." Not very smart.

The policemen seldom given approval to search things without a warrant. Took my dad up on the invitation, checked his room. Sure enough, found the jewelry. My grandfather was given a

choice of either he could deal with my dad or they could take my dad downtown, my grandfather said I'll deal with him. Fear gripped my dad's heart as he was dismissed downstairs to the basement where spankings were administered. My grandfather comes downstairs with an extension cord in his hand. My dad's eyes light up. But it's at this moment in the story. I've heard my dad tell this story scores of times, when my dad will make the remark: The thing I remembered most was not the extension cord. But it was the first time I ever saw tears come down my dad's eyes. Then he ends the story by saying this, My grandfather said to my dad, boy, you broke my heart.

One theologian says that the law is a transcript of the very character in heart of God. Friends, when we send we don't just break rules. We break daddy's heart. God is saying to us this morning. You're breaking my heart when you live in Sin. At this moment, as we close out this first and final session on this morning together. I'd like for every head to be bowed and every eye to be closed and for you to just do some soul searching.

If you could not, unless it's an emergency walk. But just sit here in silence before God. And allow the spirit of God to search your heart. Where are you living in sin? I'd even like to invite the band if they're still here to come up. And to even pray quietly during this time. Take some moments. To call out to God.

[End of Recording].