

## I Want to Leave

Jonah 4

Pastor Jeremy Cagle, September 1, 2019

Open your Bibles with me to the Book of Jonah. That's the book we're in this morning. And as you're turning there, if you are joining us for the first time today, we're in a series that we started a few weeks ago, called the "Whale of a Tale" series that we're finishing up today. This is the last one in the series. It's a short one we're doing, it's only five weeks long. We want to move on to some other things. But we're calling it the "Whale of a Tale" series because that's what Jonah is. It's a whale of a tale. It's a very unusual book in the Bible about a prophet who gets swallowed by a whale or some kind of fish because he disobeys God. Many of us have disobeyed God throughout the week, this week, but we have not gotten swallowed by a fish. I don't know about you guys, but that hasn't happened to me. That's what happened to this guy. It's a very unusual story. The Lord told him to go this way, Jonah went that way. He told him to go to Nineveh, which is in the far east. Jonah goes to Tarshish, which is in the far west, 2,000 miles away. And somewhere in the middle, the Lord catches up to him. He finds him and He says, "You can run Jonah, but you can't hide." And the fish takes him back to Nineveh where he was supposed to be in the first place. It's an unforgettable book, isn't it?

I asked you guys last week, how many of you remember the Book of Nahum? Do you remember that? And nobody raised their hands. Shame on you, shame on you. It's in the Bible, somewhere between Genesis and Revelation. But then I asked you, how many of you remember Jonah, right? We all remember Jonah. There's just something about this book that sticks with us, it catches our attention. It's a fascinating story.

And the key verse of the book is found in Jonah 2:9. If you want to look over there, Jonah 2:9. This is the main point of the book. This is what it's all about. If you look in Jonah 2:9, it says very briefly, very quickly, "Salvation is from the Lord." I've told you before, that's kind of an ironic thing to say because Jonah said that from the belly of a whale. He said it from the bottom of the ocean. Which is interesting because nothing else could save him there. Nothing else could help him, but the Lord. You can just imagine Jonah floating around in the middle of the water saying to himself, "What am I going to do now? Who's going to help me? I know, I'm going to call on the Lord." That's where he's at in that chapter. Some of your translations, if you have the ESV, it says, "Salvation belongs to the Lord" there. Which means the Lord owns it, it is His own personal possession and no one else's, and God can give salvation to whomever He chooses. I mean, if you think about it, nobody else would have saved Jonah here, but God. Nobody else would've gone through the trouble. The Lord told him to do something, he didn't do it, you can drown for all we care, right? But God saved him because that's the kind of God He is. Salvation belongs to Him, He owns it.

In our passage for today, this passage, God's going to save someone else in the story. In the passage we're going to look at this morning in Jonah chapter 4, He's going to save more than just Jonah. He's going to save some other people. And the interesting thing about chapter 4, the way the book ends, is Jonah doesn't like it. When the Lord saves someone else the same way he saved Jonah, he throws a fit.

And just to get you thinking about this, to get your minds around our passage for this morning, some of you have heard the name of Jeffrey Dahmer before. You've heard that

name, Jeffrey Dahmer. But Jeffrey Dahmer was considered to be one of the worst people in history. He was considered to be one of the most evil people who ever lived because he killed innocent people and he ate them for fun. He was a cannibal living in Ohio. He would kill innocent people, cut up their body, and then put their body parts in the freezer to eat them at his leisure. But what you may not know about Jeffrey Dahmer is that before he died in 1994, he claimed to become a Christian. Before he died in prison, this evil, wicked, horrible man said that he met a pastor who became his pen pal. They started writing back and forth, who shared the Gospel with him, told him that salvation is by grace alone through faith alone and Christ alone. And Jeffrey Dahmer said he believed it. And as soon as he did that, the sad thing about his story, is that there was an uproar from the Christian community because they said they couldn't believe it. They couldn't believe God could save a man like that. One person said, "If Jeffrey Dahmer's in heaven, I don't want to be there. I would rather stay away from that place."

But let me ask you this morning to get you thinking about this passage, what would you say to something like that? What would you say if you heard that Jeffrey Dahmer had become a Christian? What would you say if you heard that the most evil person in history got saved? Let's change the name Jeffrey Dahmer to Adolf Hitler or Joseph Stalin or Muammar Gaddafi or Saddam Hussein, or what about the leaders of ISIS? What if one of the leaders of ISIS or Al-Qaeda said that he was converted to faith in Christ? Would you believe that? Do you believe God can save evil, wicked people like that? And would you say that if they were in heaven, you don't want to be there?

See, I mention all of that because that's the background of our passage today. That's the kind of thing going on in the heart of Jonah. If you look at Jonah chapter 3...we're going to read this all the way to chapter 4:1 because I want you to see the setting for this. But if you look in chapter 3, here's the story of what happens with Jonah. We talked about this last week. If you missed it, you can go online. But chapter 3:1 says,

1 Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time, saying, 2 "Arise, and go to Nineveh the great city and proclaim to it the proclamation which I am going to tell you." 3 So Jonah arose and he went to Nineveh according to the word of the Lord. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, a three days' walk. 4 Then Jonah began to go through the city one day's walk; and he cried out and said, "Yet forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown." 5 Then the people of Nineveh believed in God; and they called a fast and put on sackcloth from the greatest of them to the least of them. 6 And when the word reached the king of Nineveh, he arose from his throne, laid aside his robe from him, covered himself with sackcloth and he sat on the ashes. 7 He issued a proclamation and it said, "In Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles: do not let man, beast, herd, or flock taste a thing. Do not let them eat or drink water. 8 But both man and beast must be covered with sackcloth; and let men call on God earnestly that each man may turn from his wicked way and from the violence which is in his hands. 9 Who knows, God may turn and relent and withdraw His burning anger so that we will not perish." 10 When God saw their deeds, that they turned from their wicked way, then God relented concerning the calamity which He had declared He would bring upon them. And He did not do it.

4:1 But (and here's the point I'm getting at here) it greatly displeased Jonah and he became angry.

I've told you before (just to explain a little bit of this) the word "relent" there in verse 10, is the Hebrew word *nakam*, which means "to relent out of compassion" or "to relent out of mercy." And the idea is that the Lord meant what He said when He said, "Yet forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown." He meant what He said when He said, "I will destroy you." But when they repented, He backed off. He forgave them. He showed mercy to them like He did to Jonah.

If you notice, Nineveh's repentance was great here. It was over the top. Their repentance was as extravagant as their sins were. They believed in God, called the fast. They even made the animals do some of that.

And chapter 4 gives us Jonah's response to this, and it says he was not happy about it. It greatly displeased him. One commentator said Jonah was a strange man to be displeased by his own success as a preacher. He had just preached the greatest revival in history, he had just led a whole town to the Lord, and he gets upset about it. That verse could literally be translated, verse 1 could be translated, "it was evil to Jonah, a great evil," and "it was wicked to him." The Hebrew language doesn't have a way of saying "more" or "most," they don't have those words. But what they do is they'll pluralize a word to show that it is more. So it was evil, a great evil. It was the most evil thing Jonah could think of. God saves a whole city, Jonah says, "That's wicked."

And I told you before, just a little background on Nineveh, you can understand why he said this. Nineveh was a city located about 600 miles to the northeast of Jerusalem. That's about from here to Calgary, so it was very close. And it was a beautiful city. The ancient Greek historian, Diodorus, said there was no city on earth like it. It was gorgeous. It was well-fortified. The walls were eight miles in diameter and they were very, very thick and impenetrable. They could hold about half a million people or more in the walls. That's a pretty good size city - and it was evil.

Nineveh was known for being one of the most wicked cities on earth. The Assyrians, the Ninevites had a reputation for doing horrible things. They would capture their enemies and skin them alive, and then hang their skin along the wall of the city to say, "Don't mess with us, leave us alone." They would impale their victims with a stake that would go up through the body and leave them hanging on it, and they would actually line the roads with these impaled bodies. A lot of people think that's where crucifixion came from. They were the first ones to invent that kind of thing. But they would stack up body after body, after body on the highway to a town. They would violate the women and burn their babies in front of them. They would behead the town leaders and pile them up in the town square. There was no end to their atrocities. There was no end to their evil.

And because of this, everybody hated the Ninevites. Everybody hated the Assyrians, including Jonah. He could not stand the thought of God saving them. He could not stand the thought of the Lord showing mercy. Jonah says here, "If they're in heaven, I don't want to be there."

And here's why, if we're going to summarize this before we get into the chapter - here's the thinking here. On some level, Jonah understood the mercy of God, on some level. But he didn't understand His sovereignty. He understood that salvation is from the Lord, God is merciful in His salvation, but he didn't understand the implications of that. He didn't understand that God saves whomever He chooses. God forgives whomever He chooses. And

we don't have the right to buck up against that. God wants to save the Ninevites, God can save the Ninevites, amen? God wants to forgive the most evil person on the planet, God can do that. Jonah doesn't have the right to say, "I don't want the Ninevites to be saved, therefore, this is evil." That's not up to him, it's up to God.

And I wonder if there's any of us here today who are struggling with this. I wonder if there are any of us here today who struggle with the sovereignty of God in salvation, because we think it's up to us to decide who gets into heaven. We think God can only save us (the good guys), but not them (the bad guys). We have a door in our hearts that says, "You get in, you get out, you get in, you don't, into heaven." I heard about a church once that would drive around the neighbourhood looking to see what kind of car people drove before they would invite them to church. And if it was a rich car, they would stop and talk to the people in the home. If it was a poor car, they kept driving. Some of us can do that in our hearts this morning. You told a lie, that's okay, you can go to heaven. You murdered someone – no, that's too far. In fact, it would be evil for God to save you. That's the kind of thing Jonah is wrestling with in this passage. And let's look at this today.

C. S. Lewis once said, "To be a Christian is to forgive the inexcusable in others, for God has forgiven the inexcusable in us." And that's what this is about this morning. And to look at this, I want you to see that the Lord gives Jonah two rebukes today for his attitude. So, if you're taking notes this morning in Jonah 4, I want you to see how the Lord gave Jonah two rebukes for his bad attitude concerning Nineveh. That's our outline for today, that's what it's all about. Two rebukes for his bad attitude. You go through this whole book and at the end of it, Jonah has a bad attitude. He's been in a whale, he's been on a ship, he's been everywhere and it just ends poorly. We said last time that if the book ended in chapter 3, it'd be a great story, wouldn't it? Jonah would be the first one to bring the good news to the nations. He would be the first one to preach to the Gentiles, but it doesn't stop in chapter 3. Unfortunately, Jonah speaks out and it gets ugly, and the Lord gives him two rebukes for this.

The first one is the rebuke for being unreasonable. That's the first rebuke the Lord gives Jonah here. He gives him a rebuke for being unreasonable. He tells Jonah that he's way off his rocker here. He says, "Jonah, you've lost your mind." And if you read on in chapter 4:1-2, it says,

1 But 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.

Just a few thoughts on this, but some have referred to this as Jonah's sinful prayer. They say that this is the time Jonah sinned in his prayer life with God. Before this, Jonah didn't pray all that much in the book. Before this, he hardly said a thing to the Lord. In chapter 1 when he sinned, he didn't pray it all. There's no prayer in chapter 1. Then in chapter 2, it's all about prayer. So he does pray when he's in the belly of the whale. But then he gets out in chapter three, doesn't pray. And in chapter 4, he says this. "Please, Lord, was this not what I said while I was still in my own country," which means Jonah prayed this in Israel. He prayed this before running away to Tarshish, and he repeats it again here to say, "For I knew that You were a gracious God and compassionate, slow to anger, abundant in loving kindness" and so forth.

That quotation is from Exodus 34 when the Lord forgave Israel for worshiping the golden calf. That's the background for that. It comes from a time when Israel sinned against the Lord. They blew it by making an idol while the Lord was giving them the Ten Commandments. You can talk about bad timing. Moses is up on the mountain getting the Ten Commandments, Israel's down at the bottom worshiping idols. And instead of judging them, the Lord forgives them. Instead of destroying them, He says this, that He is gracious and compassionate.

And here, instead of rejoicing over this, Jonah takes that verse in the Bible and he throws it back in God's face. Instead of seeing the immediate connection between the sin of Israel and the sin of Nineveh and how God showed mercy on both of them, Jonah says, "Therefore in order to forestall this, in order to keep You from making a mistake, God, I fled to Tarshish." Isn't that a terrible thing to say? "I didn't really want to sin, Lord. I really, really wanted to do the right thing, but You made me do it."

I've counselled people (you have too) who have said that. "I've done this thing, I've committed this sin (whatever it is), and why did God make me do it?" Really? You have to be crazy to say a thing like that. This is Jonah's sinful prayer, his sinful response to God.

And to show you how evil it is, if you look in verse 3, Jonah goes on to say this, it says, "Therefore now, O Lord, please take my life from me, for death is better to me than life." So now he goes from blaming God to wanting to commit suicide. Now he goes from throwing it back in God's face to saying, "I would rather die than see You do this, Lord. I hate them so much, I hate Your mercy to them so much, I would rather just end it right here." Which is kind of ironic because Jonah almost just died back in chapter 1. You remember that? I mean, he just got out of a fish. If the Lord wanted to kill him, He could have done it there. And now he prays this.

So, the Lord says in verse 4, "Do you have good reason to be angry?" When you're arguing with a crazy person, they say keep it short. So the Lord doesn't say much here. But the word for "reason" here is *yadav* in Hebrew, which means "reasonable in a pleasing way," "reasonable in a God-honouring way." And it's in a verb tense that indicates cause. So in other words, the Lord says to Jonah, "Do you have cause to be angry here?" One translation says, "Do you have any right?" The Lord said, "Have you lost your mind, Jonah? Are you off your rocker here?"

One commentator said this,

We cannot really imagine what it would be like if we were in the place of God. But if we were in His place, and if we were confronted with this situation, I imagine that at this point, we would have had just about enough of Jonah. We would recall that this man sinned and ran away after we gave him a special message. Jonah should have been delighted to do what we told him, but instead, he refused. Then he requested to be thrown overboard and we should have just obliged to let him die, but we didn't. We let him live, we forgave him. Then we re-instituted his office as a prophet, put him back in the ministry, and what does he do now? What does he say at the beginning of chapter 4? "Death is better to me than life."

What would you do if you were in God's shoes? You would probably let him die. But God doesn't. He is a gracious and compassionate God.

But it leads me to say this - this is something we've talked about earlier in the series. But sin is stupid, isn't it? Can we just say that? Sin is stupid. I've talked to a lot of people in our church about the Book of Jonah, and we're kind of going through and talking about it together. And one thing a lot of you say is, "Well, what does this mean or what does that mean?" You're dealing with a stupid man or a man in sin - say it that way. Not a stupid man. He's just a man in sin. He's *yadav*, he's unreasonable. He says things without cause. God saves him and what does he say? "Death is better to me than life." "God could have killed you in the ocean," right? "I want to end it all right here." God saves the Ninevites and he wants to kill himself. Sin is stupid. It gets you all mixed up inside. It takes you this way then that way. We've talked about this too, but the outline of the Book of Jonah really shows this. It shows how mixed up Jonah was here. Because if you were going to summarize the four chapters of Jonah and put them in a brief thing, it would go like this, "I won't go, I will go, I'm here, and I want to leave." That's the Book of Jonah - "I won't go, I will go, I'm here, and I want to leave. I don't like it. I can't stand this place." But Jonah just goes back and forth and back and forth in this book because that's what sin does to us. It makes us act like a crazy person. It's not logical. Sin is not a logical thing. A church member once called his pastor and he said that a tornado destroyed his house. It crushed it to the ground. To which the pastor replied, "Well, your sins will find you out. They're going to catch up to you." The church member replied, then he says, "But pastor, it destroyed your house too. Your house was crushed along with mine." So the pastor replied, "Well, the ways of the Lord are beyond understanding." Sin does that to us. It says crazy things.

Or to say this another way, this is the point of that illustration, sin makes us proud. It makes us say things that are arrogant. "It's your fault the tornado crushed your house, but it's not mine. I'm not a sinner but you are." This is the warning in the Book of Jonah. But Jonah sees the people of Nineveh and he says, "Guilty, guilty, guilty, guilty." Or he sees people like Jeffrey Dahmer and says, "Guilty, guilty, guilty," but he doesn't throw it back on himself. He spent the first two chapters running from God and he doesn't even realize it here because he was in sin.

When I was in Los Angeles, there were a lot of bad neighbourhoods out there, and we saw a lot of rough places. And one of the pastors in one of those neighbourhoods told me that Christians would often visit from other churches, and they would see the bars in the windows and they would see the liquor stores in every corner and all the drugs. And they would say, "Can God reach people here? Can God save people from a place like this?" And the pastor would say, "Why not? Is your neighbourhood better than ours? Are the people in your community better?" See, sin can make you do that. It can make you think you're better than others. It can make you think you're up here and everybody else is down here. Your neighbourhood is up here, you've got it all together and they don't. But that's not the way this book works. That's the problem in Jonah's thinking. He was down here with the Ninevites. He was down here on the ground and he missed that. To quote C. S. Lewis again, "To be a Christian is to forgive the inexcusable for the Lord has forgiven the inexcusable in us."

Which leads us to the next point in the passage, it leads us to the second rebuke that the Lord gave to Jonah. And just to review the first one, is a rebuke for being unreasonable. The Lord forgave Jonah over and over again we might add. That's what the whole first part of the book is about - forgiveness upon forgiveness, upon forgiveness for this man. Then the Lord forgives the Ninevites. And what does Jonah do? He throws a fit because he's being unreasonable, because sin makes us unreasonable. This is just plain stupid. Jonah had no right to respond this way, which the Lord rebukes him for. And it leads us to another rebuke in the

passage and this one takes up the majority of our text. Another rebuke He gives to the prophet here, and that is the rebuke for being unloving. Jonah was unreasonable here, but secondly, he was also unloving. He didn't care at all about the people of Nineveh. He didn't give them a second thought. Prophets are supposed to care about people. It just kind of goes with the territory. They're supposed to love others, have a concern for them. Which makes Jonah's response so messed up. And if you look in verses 5 through 6, it says this,

5 Then Jonah went out from the city and sat east of it. There he made a shelter for himself and sat under it in the shade until he could see what would happen in the city.  
6 So the Lord God appointed a plant and it grew up over Jonah to be a shade over his head to deliver him from his discomfort. And Jonah was extremely happy about the plant.

I've read a lot of things about this plant. There was a big debate over what plant it was in the fourth century between Jerome and Augustine. One said it was an ivy, the other said it was a gourd and they debated it. They went toe to toe and fought and angry letters and nasty stuff. Others said it was the castor oil plant that grows very quickly in this part of the world.

What I want you to see in this passage is that doesn't really matter so much. What matters is this in verse 6, that Jonah was extremely happy about it. That's really the point of this discussion. This is the first time Jonah was happy about anything in this book. You guys get that? This is the first time he's excited about anything but himself. The sailors tried to help Jonah in chapter 1, they tried to save him, but he's not excited about them, he doesn't care. And then the fish saves him in chapter 2, it rescues him from the sea and he doesn't to be too thrilled about that. I don't know if I was swallowed by a fish, if I would be too thrilled either. I guess if you give me my options, I might want to do that, but maybe not. Ninevites get saved in chapter 3 - not happy. This is the first time he's happy. And he's happy, it says extremely happy about a plant. Not only is he happy, he's extremely happy. He goes bananas over it. This guy's an emotional basket case, I might add. I mean, the guy is just nuts. Of all the things to be happy about, a plant?

And to explain this, if you're wondering what he was doing here, Jonah was so far gone in his sin, he was so far gone in his depression (this is how I make sense of this) that he thought that his prayers had actually changed God's mind. He thought in verses 5 through 6, that God was actually going to destroy Nineveh. So he goes outside of the city to watch.

Now, there may be some other interpretations of that. I won't hold to strongly that. But it seems to me from the context what's going on here, he probably went up on a hill so he could look down and see the fireworks. And out of His mercy and to prove a point, the Lord provides shade with the plant. Jonah was kind of like a kid at a Canucks game, holding a hot dog and a Coke waiting for the big show, and it never comes.

If you read in verses 7 through 11, it says in verse 7, "But God appointed a worm when dawn came the next day and it attacked the plant and it withered." That's one of the many things God appoints in this book. He appoints a wind to go after Jonah on the sea. He appoints a fish, He appoints a plant. Now, He appoints a worm to kill the plant. Verse 8,

8 When the sun came up God appointed a scorching east wind (there's another one), and the sun beat down on Jonah's head so that he became faint and begged with all his soul to die, saying, "Death is better to me than life." (So much for the happiness).

9 Then God said to Jonah, “Do you have good reason to be angry about the plant?” And he said, “I have good reason to be angry, even to death.” 10 Then the Lord said, “You had compassion on the plant for which you did not work and which you did not cause to grow, which came up overnight and perished overnight. 11 Should I not have compassion on Nineveh, the great city in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know the difference between their right and left hand, as well as many animals?”

Just to paraphrase all of that, the Lord says, “Jonah, you're being unloving. You care more about the plant than you do the people I just saved.” The Lord tried to reason with him verbally, it didn't work. So now, He gives him a visual illustration of a plant and He says, “You care more about that than you do 120,000 people who do not know the difference between their right hand and their left.” That's usually taken as a reference to children. So there were 120,000 children in Nineveh, 120,000 kids, and the Lord says, “You care more about the plant than you do the kids of this city.” He even says at the end there, “As well as many animals.” I mean, the Lord is just trying to get his attention. “You care more about the plant than you do the animals.”

And just to walk you through the passage a little bit, because there's a few things to explain. When the Lord kills the plant, Jonah says in verse 8, “Death is better to me than life.” And then in verse 9 he says, “Then God said to Jonah, ‘Do you have good reason to be angry about the plant?’ And he said, ‘I have good reason to be angry, even to death.’” That is the fourth reference to suicide Jonah makes in this book. Four chapters, four references to suicide. He's the most suicidal person in the Bible that I could think of next to Job. The first one is in chapter 1:12, where he says, “Pick me up and throw me into the sea.” There were other ways to handle that situation, Jonah, when the storm was going on the ocean - you could have repented. You could have prayed to the Lord and asked for forgiveness. But he talks about suicide then. He does it in chapter 4:3, which we just looked at. “Death is better to me than life.” He does it in verse 8 and he does it in verse 9. Which kind of makes you wonder when the Lord is actually going to kill him. But he's so consumed in his sin that he's talking like this.

So to try to reason with him, verse 10 says, “Then the Lord said, “You had compassion on the plant for which you did not work and which you did not cause to grow, which came up overnight and perished overnight. Should I not have compassion on Nineveh?” In other words, “You didn't make this plant, Jonah. You didn't put it in the ground, you didn't water it, you didn't make it grow. I made Nineveh, I created these people. I made them grow, I watched over them. And the least you could do is appreciate that. The least you could do is understand. Why should I not have compassion on Nineveh?”

And if you notice, that's how the book ends. I mean, that's how it closes. It doesn't tell you what Jonah did, it doesn't tell you how he responds to the Lord. It just ends with a great big silence, as if to say, what would you do if you were in a similar situation? How would you respond if God said that to you? If you were writing out your own autobiography like it seems like Jonah is doing here, what would you put in chapter 4:12?

There's a tradition among the Jews which says that as soon as God said this, Jonah fell on his face and said, “I'm sorry, govern Your world according to Your mercy.” Which he might've done. I mean that is possible because this story is in the Bible and Jonah was the only one who saw all of this. So, it seems like Jonah did get right with the Lord, and then write this

down for us to see. It seems like there's a happy ending to this story, but it's not right here because this is a warning.

It's been said that your walk with the Lord will either be an example or a warning to people. This is a warning for us not to do what Jonah did, not to repeat his mistake. Jonah was hard-hearted here wasn't he? This is a hard-hearted man. It doesn't seem like he was always that way, but for this brief moment in time in this book, he's almost cruel. To walk up on a hill with your hot dog and Coke ready to watch children die is cruel. I mean, that's just cold. That's what Jonah does here. He's happy about the plant, doesn't care about the people. He's happy about the shade, he doesn't care about the kids. He's totally checked out on the things of God.

It's also been said that a broken heart is better than no heart at all, and that's what Jonah had here. He had no heart at all. And we can all get that way too if we're not careful. We can all get to the point where we don't care anymore about people. Charles Spurgeon said, "Our gourd can become our God. Our plant can become our number one priority." We can care more about comfort and shade and things like that than helping the people of Nineveh.

I remember several years ago when I was in Indiana, I'd had a full day of ministry. It was a long day. It started at eight o'clock in the morning and I was just getting into my car at seven at night to go home, when a man pulled up into the church parking lot, he just gets out of the car, just starts talking. (That's always interesting in a church parking lot. You never know what people are going to say.) And he says, "Hey, is the service over? Oh that's too bad because I'm so hungry for God." And then he just left. Just like that, he just got into his car and he was gone. And it didn't hit me until a moment after he left that I should have stopped him. I should have said, "Hey, wait a minute, tell me about your hunger for God. Tell me about what's going on in your heart." I should've chased after him down the parking lot, but I didn't because we can become hard-hearted. We can become tired or callous or cold to the things of the Lord. I didn't mean to be cold, I just had a long day and the guy, he was gone before I knew it. But we can find ourselves going this way when God is going this way. We can find ourselves caring about plants when He wants to send us people.

Another lesson for Jonah here in chapter 4 is this, we can know our Bible but fail to believe it. We can know Scripture but fail to apply it. Jonah knew his Bible here. Jonah had very good theology. He would've made A+ in his Hebrew 101 class. I mean, this book is full of Scripture. Jonah was written toward the end of the Old Testament. He lived as it was drawing to a close, and so he had access to a lot of books. He would have known about the writings of Moses, he would have known about the writings of David and some of the prophets. So he quotes Exodus 34 up above this to say, "For I know that You're a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger, abundant in lovingkindness." That is a correct quotation of that book. He nailed it right on the head. Some say he quoted from the Psalms in chapter 2. There's something like seven references to the Psalms in Jonah chapter 2. He quotes from the Book of Job to say, "Death is better than life." He makes a connection with Job there, but he didn't understand all of that. He didn't put his Bible into practice. He didn't apply what we know. And we can do the same thing today if we're not careful. Our cold heart can lead to cold feet. We can be hearers of the word, but not doers of it when it comes to loving people. That's what Jonah was wrestling with at the end of this book.

Listen, God is in the saving business. He is a gracious and compassionate God. Salvation is from the Lord, it belongs to Him, which means that he does love children more than plants.

He loves sinners more than shade, and we should too. We should love others like He does. That is the lesson of the Book of Jonah.

In World War II, during the battle for the Pacific, a US Army medic named Desmond Doss was involved in a skirmish on top of a hill called Hacksaw Ridge. It was a high plateau, 400 feet off the ground. And as they attacked it, the US soldiers found themselves outgunned by the Japanese Army, and they had to retreat off the hill, leaving many soldiers behind, including Desmond Doss. They were stranded up on the hill.

But instead of hiding in a foxhole all night long amidst enemy fire, Doss made a makeshift gurney (he was a medic) and he began lowering injured soldiers down off the ridge all night until he had saved 75 of them. He kept lowering them down one by one until daylight came and the enemy saw him. And afterwards, he told reporters this, he said, "All night long, all I thought about was, 'Lord, please help me to save one more. Lord, please help me to reach just one more man.'" That is the heart of God in the Book of Jonah. That's the heart of God in the Bible. Read every page and you will see that God just wants to save one more person. He wants to reach just one more man.

John 3:16, the most famous verse in the Bible says, "For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have everlasting life." That means that God sent Jesus into the world because He loves the world, not because He hates it. I mean, God went through this whole business of giving His Son to us because He wants to save sinners, not destroy them. If He wanted to destroy sinners, He didn't have to bring Jesus at all. Luke 19:10 says, "For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost," and we need to have the heart of our Saviour this morning.

Which leads me just to ask this question, how are you doing with that today? Do you believe God can save the most evil people on earth? Do you believe He can forgive the Jeffrey Dahmer's and the Adolf Hitlers if they believe in Jesus? And does the thought of that make you happier or does it make you angry? Does it make you rejoice or does it make you want to call God evil? Do you see yourself up here or down here? Are you down there with the Ninevites or are you up on a hill above them judging them?

That's what Jonah was all about. That's how the book ends. "Should I not have compassion on Nineveh?" The answer is yes, absolutely, He should have compassion on all those who believe. Which is good news for you this morning because no matter who you are, no matter what you have done, you can be forgiven today if you trust in Christ. God is not playing games with you my friend. He's not messing around with you. If you believe in Jesus, you will be saved like the people of Nineveh. The evangelist George Whitefield said it this way, he said,

Come all you liars, come all you Pharisees, come all your fornicators, adulterers, swearers, and blasphemers, come to Christ and He will take away your filth. He will cleanse you from your pollution, your sin shall be done away with. Come, come, come, my guilty brethren, I beseech you for Christ's sake and for the sake of your eternal souls, come ye unto Jesus Christ.

That's a great way to end the Book of Jonah. That's a great way to draw it to a close. Let's have a word of prayer.

Father, we thank you for the words of this great book. It's such a short book, but it has such a powerful message to all of us, and that is to have compassion on others; to remember what You have saved us from, and to remember how greatly You can save the lost. Lord, give us a heart for the lost this morning. Give us compassion for them.

And I pray for any who are here this morning who see themselves in the people of Nineveh. There may be some here this morning who have sinned in great ways and they feel the depth of that, they feel the greatness of their sin. Lord, help them know that they have a Saviour that can match their sin. They have a Saviour that can triumph over it, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Father, thank you for being a compassionate God. Thank you for being gracious and slow to anger. None of us would be saved if You were not. Just as You were patient with Jonah, You've been patient with each person in this room, and we rejoice and thank you for that. May we go out now and please You as we apply these words to our lives. We pray in Jesus' name, amen.