

Jonah 3-4

Good evening, Church, it is great to be here with you tonight.

We are going to finish the Book of Jonah this evening.

There are two Chapters left in our study...

Please turn in your Bibles to Jonah chapter 3.

I read an interesting story about two inmates this week. In 2018, Cody Howard and Tanner Jacobson attempted a dramatic escape from a Washington State courtroom while handcuffed.

They had the brilliant idea to run from the courtroom, and at just the right time, they thought they could get away.

They knew the stairway well from previous trips to the courthouse and made their break to the emergency exit.

But what they did not count on was a judge to go above and beyond his duty that day.

Judge R.W. Buzzard rose up to help in the chase and actively pursued the two guilty runners, and he tackled Howard just before he reached the exit.

Jacobson briefly made it outside, but deputies apprehended him.

And before long, both men were standing before the very judge they tried to run from, who chased them down himself.¹

I thought that was pretty funny, and it seemed to connect well. Cody Howard and the prophet Jonah had something in common.

Both ran from the authorities, were pursued, and ended up going to where they had fled from.

We learned last time that you cannot outrun God.

¹ <https://www.theolympian.com/news/local/article222118915.html>

A person might try, but God is Sovereign, and He has His ways of bringing a person to align with His will for their life.

Remember what we read in Jonah 1:17, “Now the Lord had prepared a great fish to swallow Jonah.”

God will work in all of our lives, change our circumstances, and bring things about to get us to wise up.

You see, Church, God knows how to put obstacles in our way, trials on our path, hang-ups in our lives, when He needs our attention.

At times, if He needs to, He can even manufacture a great fish to put you in the belly of to get you to where you need to be.

Last week, that was the number one comment I got from people.

Pastor, I know what that fish feels like.

Many of you took the path of Jonah...

You remember the smell of that belly, the stomach acids scarred you up pretty good, the darkness of that season in your life, you can never forget it...

He turned up the heat in your life until all the sin and pride were melted away, and all you could do was reach out for His Mercy and Grace.

Which He freely and joyfully offered you.

Now, remember that in Chapter 1, Jonah began his run from God's call, and, interestingly, he is found sleeping in the middle of the ship.

In Chapter 2, the prophet of God is there in the belly of the fish, repenting of his sin, and reaching back toward his God.

We will see here in Chapter 3 that Jonah will be right where God needed him, in the city of Nineveh; he is now with God.

But unfortunately, in Chapter 4, we will see Jonah's presuppositions in life are all too much for him, those underlying beliefs, assumptions, the foundations in a

person's life, that we hold to, that we assume to be true...

And instead of seeing things as God wants him to see them, his presuppositions will lead him back to bigotry and prejudice, as he groans over God's mercy...

So Jonah ran from God, ran back to God, ran with God, then ran without God.

We left off last time with the Lord speaking to the fish, and the obedient creature vomited Jonah onto dry land.

And starting here in Chapter 3, God will renew Jonah's call to minister to the Assyrians in the city of Nineveh.

Remember the difficulty of this task; these people most likely ravaged Jonah's hometown, his neighbors and friends, and even his family.

The Assyrians went above and beyond in their sadistic ways against their enemies, and the images of their barbarity would leave traumatic conditions in any person.

Even the stories of their ways were horrific, if not seen by Jonah's eyes himself, and only heard, it would be enough.

But, overcoming his fierce dislike and deep hatred, the prophet knows the cost of disobedience...

And he obeys the Lord here...

Look now at verse 1 of Chapter 3...

Jonah Preaches at Nineveh

3:1 Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the second time, saying, **2** "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and preach to it the message that I tell you."

Church, already, there is a powerful lesson here for us.

Note the phrase, "the second time."

You have to understand that these words speak to the character of our God.

We sometimes hear that the Old Testament God is a mean God...

But this is the remarkable thing about our study here on Wednesday Night: we have gone through the Old Testament page by page and have really studied God's Word.

We see, time and again, that He is a God of Grace and Mercy.

God is willing here to give this reluctant, rebellious, running prophet a second chance.

That is the real story of our God.

I am taking a Theology Class, and I believe it is more fruitful for a pastor to teach systematically through the entire Bible to understand God, rather than to listen to one fallen man after another give their endless teachings on who they think God is.

One thing we see consistently is that He is a gracious and forgiving God.

If ever there was a person whose pride and prejudice should have upset God, it was Jonah.

God gives Jonah another chance to work through his selfishness and his stubborn heart.

It is probably important here to consider something...

If our God is so gracious and forgiving... and we call ourselves Christians, we call ourselves by our God's Name...

I imagine we should live our lives graciously as well.

You remember when Peter came to Jesus and thought he was pretty spiritual when he suggested they forgive their enemies seven times.

Remember what Jesus said...

Matt 18:22 "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven."

The reality is that we are not asked to do anything in our lives that our God is not willing to do Himself.

How many times has God given you another shot?
How many times has God forgiven you? For the same thing?

If we take an honest assessment of our own lives, we will see that He is not only the God of second chances, but of 3rd chances, 10 chances, some of us know Him as the God of 100 chances...

It is in His nature to forgive... and not only that, He will help us overcome...

Notice in verse 2 that God told Jonah to preach the message He would give him.

We learned from verse 2 of chapter 1 last time, God told Jonah...

Jonah 1:2 "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against it; for their wickedness has come up before Me."

This is a message of repentance...

And this would not be an easy ministry.

As we mentioned already, the Assyrians were merciless to their enemies.

They had no moral compass... There was no right or wrong... Might was right...

They would impale their enemies and display them as a public warning.

They skinned alive, beheaded, mutilated, and publicly displayed corpses.

They were hideous and terrible people...

I am sure Jonah was questioning the mission.

This would be like you being called today on the street corner of Mecca, and claiming that Jesus is the only way to God, and that Muhammad was a false prophet.

We were just on the Temple Mount a few weeks ago, and we were not even allowed to pray up there.

When we were up there, we saw one young Jewish girl who was being taken away for praying.

Of course, they could not tell that I was praying in my heart to the Lord Jesus.

But there are risks to even preaching on the Temple Mount.

I usually teach with the group... I make sure we are close enough to the exit so we can do a quick teaching session there and exit without incident.

However, I am sure Jonah questioned this risky assignment.

But after 3 days and 3 nights in the belly of that fish, the risk was worth it...

Digestive fluids and stomach acids have a significant impact on getting us on the right track...

Look at verse 3 now...

3 So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, a three-day journey *in extent*.
4 And Jonah began to enter the city on the first day's

walk. Then he cried out and said, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!"

We see here that Nineveh was an exceedingly great city.

Archaeology has revealed that ancient Nineveh was three miles long and one and a half miles wide.

The walls were 100' high and 40' thick...

It is said that three chariots could race side by side atop the walls.

The walls had 1,500 towers spread across them.

It was an incredible ancient city, one of many great cities along the Tigris River Valley.

Verse 3 reveals that it took three days to make your way through the busy city.

The population was nearly 1 million when Jonah came to minister there.

Most of the people would have lived outside the city walls...

It is likely that Jonah started preaching in the suburbs and worked his way into the city center.

He only had one message, eight words in English anyway, “Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown.”

We see the number 40 used here in Jonah’s sermon...

In Biblical numerology, 40 is seen as a period of testing...

Thinking of Israel’s 40 years in the wilderness.

Moses himself was in the wilderness of Midian for forty years.

Remember the 12 spies, they spent 40 days inspecting the promised land.

Jesus’s 40 days of being tempted by Satan.

After the resurrection of Jesus, He was seen by the disciples for forty days before He ascended to heaven.

Forty is seen as a period of testing... or preparation.

The people of Nineveh are hearing here that God is going to judge them...

They don't want to wait forty days to see what will happen to them...

They reasoned within themselves, as Jonah had thought, they wanted to repent...

They must have known something of the Hebrew God, and His Mercy...

“Also, something to consider here, Assyrian Court letters, omen texts, and the ‘Chronicles of the Early Kings’ (kept in the cuneiform libraries excavated at Nineveh), which hold an entrenched belief that the gods spoke through extraordinary signs.”

“A single prophetic cry would carry weight if preceded by unusual phenomena. The inhabitants of

Nineveh were primed to heed ominous warnings, particularly when destruction was dated (forty days).”²

Being three days and three nights in that great fish would have left Jonah marred, likely with an appearance that shocked people.

His skin, hair, and clothes would have been disfigured, and I believe this is important.

They held beliefs in fish gods, such as Dagon, the fish-man.³

They could have seen him as a celestial ambassador, who was pointing to Yahweh...

These things cannot be dismissed, as much as we see Jonah’s presuppositions playing into the story here, the Ninevites also had their own deeply rooted beliefs and traditions.

² https://biblehub.com/q/Why_did_Ninevites_quickly_believe_Jonah.htm

³ Herodotus, Hist. 2.90

And God is meeting them where they are at... sending this otherworldly looking prophet from the sea, to send His message.

No matter what you believe about their presuppositions, there is no doubting that they believe the message is from the Hebrew God, Yahweh.

This much is clear in the text: they can work through their own deeply held beliefs, and they know who they are ultimately accountable to here.

Look at verse 5...

The People of Nineveh Believe

5 So the people of Nineveh believed God, proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest to the least of them. **6** Then word came to the king of Nineveh; and he arose from his throne and laid aside his robe, covered *himself* with sackcloth and sat in ashes. **7** And he caused *it* to be proclaimed and published throughout Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying,

Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything; do not let them eat, or drink water. **8** But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily to God; yes, let every one turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands. **9** Who can tell *if* God will turn and relent, and turn away from His fierce anger, so that we may not perish?

Now, this is absolutely remarkable, from the common farmer to the king, all the people of God repented of their sin.

Even the animals are fasting...

We know revival has hit when even the animals join the fast.

The citizens are called to humble themselves in sackcloth and ashes, and they cried out to the one True God for mercy.

What an amazing thing to consider, a whole kingdom or a whole nation experiencing revival...

It has happened in our history a few times; it would be amazing to see it again...

I have always held out hope that our eyes would see another Great Awakening...

Where the nation humbles itself before Almighty God and repents... instead of excuses its sin...

I imagine the promise the Lord gave Israel, as Solomon was dedicating the Temple... could be our own promise...

2 Chron. 7:14 if My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land. Repentance is more than just words; it is more than just being sorry for something...

It is what Solomon says here... turning away... This is the first step to Revival... Repentance... Turning from our wicked ways... not excusing them... not getting comfortable with them... not justifying them...

Adjusting our lives to the Word of God... above our feelings, above what culture says, above all...

Look what can happen, verse 10...

10 Then God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God relented from the disaster that He had said He would bring upon them, and He did not do it.

If you are wondering tonight if God has enough Mercy for you.

Let the Ninevites stand as witnesses for you on the witness stand.

You will not find many more vile, mean, and selfish people in all of history, and here we see one of the single greatest revivals that ever took place.

In the Church Age, at Pentecost, 3,000 people were Born Again.

The First Great Awakening in our nation saw tens of thousands come to the Lord.

The Second Great Awakening saw hundreds of thousands of people come to the Lord over several decades.

Yet there in Nineveh, a whole city repented and turned to God.

In a few days, almost a million people were swept into the Kingdom of God.

This has to be the greatest awakening in all of history.

The most remarkable thing to consider about it all is that God used an obstinate and even prejudiced minister.

Sometimes, we look out at God's chosen ministers, and we think, "Why God, why them?"

"They are so flawed, so messed up, so filled with imperfections."

But you see, it proves that God uses all of us more despite us than because we are worthy or awesome.

It is when we think we are something that God usually shelves us...

Think of this story here, how could a Jewish Prophet ever lead these pagans to Yahweh, really?

It had to be God; it had to be supernatural, beyond any man.

And when we look at ministry, that is how we have to look at it.

It is beyond the man... God will work, despite us... He owes the worker nothing... He owes us nothing...

It is a great privilege to be used by God...

Understand something, God had already been working, way before Jonah showed up...

History tells us that the king at the time was Assurdan III, and during his reign, there were many natural disasters.

Remember, these people interpreted these things as signs and omens.

If there were something like an eclipse, that would be considered a sign from God; when an earthquake struck, or a famine hit, or they were defeated on the battlefield, all of this was considered an omen.

All of which the Ninevites had been through prior to this fish-smelling prophet showing up.

Bleached white skin... again from the fish... well, you have a bald, Hebrew, albino-looking man...

Think about what Jesus said about Jonah...

Luke 11:30 For as Jonah became a sign to the Ninevites,

It could be, too, that Jonah's story had reached the Ninevites...

Here is a man who ran from God, and God gave a second chance...

He was a man with racial presuppositions and deep hatred in his heart, and that superseded his obedience, yet God loved him enough to get him on the right track.

As he became a sign to them... he stood as a symbol of God's mercy... and they appealed directly to that mercy.

And this is the ultimate reality about revival and awakenings: they come to us in God's perfect timing.

We cannot manufacture them or conjure them up.

We cannot manipulate God or perform special services to pray a certain formula to bring about revival.

We cannot call a service a revival service and determine it to be so...

It comes to us in God's perfect timing... and the time was perfect there in Nineveh...

We can only hope and pray our hearts remain open, that when the time becomes right for us, we are open to the Spirit's leading...

We allow God to use our desperate circumstances, even the most unlikely servants, and trust in the work of His Spirit.

Remember what Jonah realized in his own brokenness last time...

Jonah 2:9 "Salvation is of the Lord."

We know this to be true, right?

Jesus said, John 6:44 "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him."

Also in

John 15:26 "But when the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me.

You realize when a person comes to Jesus, when they are Born Again, it is a supernatural working of the Spirit?

We cannot schedule a revival, but we can pray and open our hearts to one.

One last thing, I want to mention before we move on...

Some have argued that because God did not bring judgment after 40 days, Jonah was a false prophet, and God is a fickle God.

Again, this is something that irks me about the Theologian...

They want to find little things to debate... Can God change? Does he lie? Are His plans subject to change? Does he remain the same? They debate the immutability of God.

And they get lost in little loopholes, and I find it fascinating, because you follow their long trails and thought processes... and they think they have one on God...

They got something on Him, and they got Him backed into a corner...

But they usually get so fixated on a little verse, a part of the Bible...

And this is why I say, what we do here is so much better than what Bible College or Seminary can produce in knowing our God...

Just going through the Bible gives you such a balanced view of Him...

It is not so complicated... We know Him... We know His Ways... We are not looking for an “Aha moment” on Him...

We already learned about His ways through the prophet Jeremiah...

Jer 18:7-10 The instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, to pull down, and to destroy *it*, **8** if that nation against whom I have spoken turns from its evil, I will relent of the disaster that I thought to bring upon it. **9** And the instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant *it*, **10** if it does evil in My sight so that it does not obey My voice, then I will relent concerning the good with which I said I would benefit it.

It really is not that complicated... We know God will relent from the judgment planned and give space for healing.

And in the case of the Ninevites, the judgment was only pushed out... it still came, as we will see in Nahum's writings.

They were spared for 150 years... but ultimately... it fell on them...

God does not change His mind or His ways; He has operated within the capacity of His Grace and Mercy from the Garden...

He told Adam, "From the day you eat of it, you will surely die," but Adam lived over 900 years... death was prolonged...

God never changes... He is a God who, time and time again, seeks repentance... seeks to give chances... we know there are multiple paths before all of us... choices to make... and consequences to follow for each decision we make...

It is safer to say that He never changes, but how He relates to us is dependent on our response to His Grace... If we choose to live in His Will and Purposes of our life or not...

Our change in attitude toward Him definitely affects the outcome of our lives...

We cannot blame Him, or make God out to be a skitzo God, who is all over the place in His personality... the Word clearly teaches who He is...

Let's get into Chapter 4 now...

Jonah's Anger and God's Kindness

4:1 But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he became angry. **2** So he prayed to the LORD, and said, "Ah, LORD, was not this what I said when I was still in my country? Therefore I fled previously to Tarshish; for I know that You *are* a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, One who relents from doing harm. **3** Therefore now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for *it is* better for me to die than to live!"

This book would have been better if it had just ended at Chapter 3.

I think all our Christian fairy-tale books and children's ministry lessons typically stop there.

But, this is the reality of our Bible... It is not a fairy tale... it is real life, never allowing for pretense...

Unfortunately, modern preaching has led people to feel they need picture-perfect lives to be someone in the Church...

We need to have it all together... we need the Instagram fam, with perfectly dressed church kids, all playing the part, too.

But you will have trouble finding a single person in the Bible who fits our modern imagery of churchianity.

These people were messed up... broken people...

Jonah... is another prime example.

Look at his reaction... His bigotry shines through here...

He hated the Ninevites... Hate is such a strong word... but it fits.

Jonah believed, as many Jews did, that the Hebrews were the only ones entitled to know God.

Jonah here would rather die than share his faith with these wicked people.

Think back to Jonah on the boat when the storm was raging: this man would rather die than see sinners repent and be saved.

Jonah's fears have now come true.

We see here why he did not want to go in the first place.

He understood his God all too well, and He knew if these people showed any repentance, that God, so loving and so merciful, would be so ready and willing to receive them with open arms.

Jonah is so grieved over it all, he would rather die...

Jonah knows the enormous depth of his God's love...
He probably knew all along that God was sending Him
on this mission because God was already working on
their hearts.

Every sinner on this planet has the opportunity to
come to Christ... No matter how wretched they are...

Church, this is something to consider tonight...

I don't know if you harbor hate in your heart...

Maybe you despise those who despise us as
Christians...

Maybe you are so politically involved that you cannot
stand a certain political party...

Could it be a class of people, those who cross over,
who have been here, who claim here...

The divisions are deep...

Would you be willing to reach across that divide and
share?

Think about Jonah; he had no problem getting his second chance.

He did not mind God's mercy and Grace for himself...

He did not like the idea of it going to others.

Understand something tonight, Church, our biases, our dislikes, our political leanings don't determine the reach of God's mercies and outstretched arms.

He doesn't see the world through our eyes... We have to attempt to see the world through His eyes...

Who are we to keep this wonderful Gospel to ourselves... to receive the Love and Forgiveness of God, and withhold it from anyone?

God had intended the Jews to be a light to the nations, to be a blessing to the nations, to draw the nations to the One True God...

They, as a people group, repeatedly failed to reach that potential.

Jonah had a chance to rejoice in being used in that great work... but he, like every generation of Hebrews since, wanted to keep it to himself.

You know, Jesus stood up against the cities of His day, rebuking them for this attitude... we stood in one of our last trips, Korizan...

Jesus said, **Matt. 11:21 “Woe to you, Chorazin!”**

He talked about them witnessing incredible works and signs.

And how it would be more tolerable in the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for them.

Because of the incredible witness they had.

We stood in that city's judged ruins... since the first century, Jesus's words have laid waste to that place since...

They could not understand their great privilege, the calling they had, the establishment Jews remained proud and disobedient against Jesus...

Jesus would say

Matt 12:41 The men of Nineveh will rise in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and indeed a greater than Jonah *is* here.

Because their hearts were cold and proud... and they remained obstinate to the call God had placed on their lives...

The very Ninevites Jonah despised will rise in judgment against them...

Church, I pray, I hope that we never grow hard toward the people and the world we are supposed to be extending God's Mercy and Love to with this Gospel of Grace.

The witness of Scripture seems to point to our religious blockades to our God as being the chief sin above all others.

Look at verse 4...

4 Then the LORD said, "*Is it* right for you to be angry?"

5 So Jonah went out of the city and sat on the east side of the city. There he made himself a shelter and sat under it in the shade, till he might see what would become of the city.

God asks Jonah a question...

We see Him do this throughout the Bible in how He deals with people.

He asked Adam and Eve, “Where are you?”

Remember when David committed his sin with Bathsheba and the murder of Uriah.

God’s prophet Nathan asked him,
2 Sam 12:9 Why have you despised the commandment of the LORD, to do evil in His sight?

We see this throughout God’s Word...

Paul even uses the question, **“Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not!” Romans 6:1**

God will ask Jonah a few more questions in this final chapter...

We see here that Jonah is still hoping God will do as He did with Sodom and Gomorrah...

He goes to a hill to watch the show... after all, how could God let them get away with all their sins?

But as I mentioned already, the Word of God that Jonah brought to these people spared them from judgment for 150 years.

The Ninevites believed a prophet who hated them...

I think this is an important point here...

People are looking for anything to disprove God's Word, or diminish God's Truth...

People want to blame the pastor... if a minister is rotten... they don't want to believe the message he preaches...

No, we cannot do that... The Word of God is separate...

The messenger will be accountable to God... we see Jonah being dealt with here...

But each of us is accountable to God's Word...

That is the Authority... that is why I often try to tell you...

Here, in this Church, the Word of God is the Authority, above man, above our emotions, above culture, above government, above all...

We are accountable to the Word... regardless of any person... how we feel about it...

I saw something the other day... A person was making a case that they did not believe in a certain doctrine because it created a fear in them as a child...

That is not a warranted reason not to believe something...

That is emotion-led doctrine... we don't have the authority to change anything in God's Word because we don't like it, or it made us feel a certain way...

So, God's Word is supreme... when that can be the case...

Throughout History, when people have set out to do that, that is the seed of revival... coupled with prayer... we are on to something big...

Nineveh believed a preacher who hated them...

God's Word above all...

Look at verse 6, as God deals with His servant...

6 And the LORD God prepared a plant and made it come up over Jonah, that it might be shade for his head to deliver him from his misery. So Jonah was very grateful for the plant. **7** But as morning dawned the next day God prepared a worm, and it so damaged the plant that it withered. **8** And it happened, when the sun arose, that God prepared a vehement east wind; and the sun beat on Jonah's head, so that he grew faint. Then he wished death for himself, and said, "*It is better for me to die than to live.*"

God is now again merciful and causes what is probably a date palm to grow over his head; we saw many of

these while in Israel, and they grow in that part of the world heartily.

The big leaves would have provided nice shade... understand, Nineveh is in northern Iraq, where temperatures can reach up to 130 degrees, much like Lake Havasu, Arizona.

The hottest day I worked in Havasu was 120, and it was pretty intense...

A palm tree leaf would have been nice framing that roof that day.

And God prepares Jonah a supernatural shade...

How he did it, the theologians have their theories, but I have no trouble believing that God, who created the heavens and the earth, can create a Palm Tree to shade the prophet overnight.

This man did not deserve it, but again, the mercy of God is in view, as this undeserved blessing is here for Jonah to experience.

How many times does this happen in your life?

God showers you with a blessing in a season you do not deserve it...

To me, He seems to highlight the fact that it is by Grace I relate to Him...

But God sent a worm to damage the plant, and then sent an east wind, bowing the shade away, exposing Jonah's bald head to the sun, and he grew faint, and wished for death.

He had such a grim outlook on life.

And some people are built like this... they cannot handle any adversity in life...

It does not matter what it is... their first reaction to anything hard is... "I cannot go on!"

One day, Jonah is enjoying the gift of God, the blessings of shade, oh what a day, God's Grace is so wonderful...

But just one day later, he is wishing for death, upset that God took away a tree he did not even deserve to have in the first place.

Look at verse 9...

9 Then God said to Jonah, "*Is it* right for you to be angry about the plant?"

And he said, "*It is* right for me to be angry, even to death!"

We see here that even after receiving Grace from God... Jonah treated the blessing as though he were entitled to it.

Now he believed he deserved it.

That palm tree was mine. How dare you mess with it, God?

Jonah is so attached to this plant because he hates people.

God rebukes him for loving something like that more than human life.

I remember a guy in Havasu having a property dispute with his neighbor over a couple of trees.

He invited Jess and me over for dinner; he was from the Church...

He loved his trees... and the neighbor had built this huge wall between the properties...

He called it the Great Wall of China. The guy used mismatched blocks and made it as ugly as possible, and he did it because our friend wouldn't budge on these two very unimpressive trees.

And I thought to myself, "Dude, you are a Christian, and those little tiny trees right there are not that big of a deal, and you just made a stand on them, over your witness with your neighbor..."

I asked him, "What about sharing the Lord with the guy?"

He said, "I would rather him go to hell."

He moved from that house a couple of years later, and all that fighting was for nothing.

And people can get this way: they can get more attached to their plants, their pets, their cars, their

diets, their petunia gardens, and just silly things, and they convince themselves they are more important than the souls of the people they are called to reach for Jesus.

They are mine...

Maybe you play video games all day, you sew, or paint, maybe you scroll on your phone, or golf...

None of those things are wicked things to do... but if they are what you use to escape people, they can become a hindrance to the work God called us to.

God loved the Ninevites; He did not care so much for the plant that shaded Jonah's head.

Maybe you are more concerned about your plant, pet, hobby, than you are the Ninevites around you...

Hopefully, God stirs you to put the lesser thing aside for the more important thing.

Let's finish this out...

Starting in verse 10...

10 But the LORD said, "You have had pity on the plant for which you have not labored, nor made it grow, which came up in a night and perished in a night. **11** And should I not pity Nineveh, that great city, in which are more than one hundred and twenty thousand persons who cannot discern between their right hand and their left — and much livestock?"

God gave Jonah something really meaningless, and he enjoyed it immensely.

Then God took the plant and revealed what really mattered.

Jonah became detached from the people God loved, and wanted his plant.

God makes one final appeal to soften Jonah's heart and rid him of his presuppositions and biases.

Don't you care about the people, Jonah?

Don't you care about the kids?

The same question can be asked of us tonight...

Do we care about the people God cares about?

Or are we blinded by our own prejudices that we stop up our ears to the cries of help all around us?

Have we become more concerned for the needs of dogs and cats in society than we have for the needs of children?

Don't waste your life by sitting there pouting about meaningless things, selfish things...

Care about the things God cares about...

Serve God by serving others...

Get busy about reaching the Lost... it will be hard work, sacrificial work, we will have to die to self...

But we don't want to be guilty of keeping God's Mercy and Love all to ourselves.

We need to spread it far and wide, especially to those we don't think deserve it...

That is the lesson from the book of Jonah.

We have to get past ourselves...

And see the world the way Jesus does.

We don't know how it ended for Jonah... but archaeologists did uncover a tomb in ancient Nineveh that bore an inscription for the prophet Jonah.

I hope he learned, ministered there, and, in the end, loved the Assyrians...

The tomb was honored until Isis blew it up in 2014...

But the greatest miracle in this book is that a bigot may have been transformed and ministered to the people he hated.

Let's pray.