

A Chronicle of Redemption

Chapter 24: Fish Food

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CHAPTER 24: FISH FOOD

Jonah

If you have a Bible, and I hope you do, I invite you to open with me to Jonah 1. I don't think it is a coincidence that we come to this book on this day, the fourth of July. I want to be really careful that on this day when we celebrate our freedom as Americans, celebrate our independence from all other nations, and think about this book, the book of Jonah. Obviously, I want us to be cognizant on of the fact that we don't equate Israel...the people of Israel, the nation of Israel, the people of God in the Old Testament...with The United States of America. There are major significant differences.

The Question for Us...

At the same time, I think there are a lot of similarities between what we see in Jonah's heart and what we see in our own hearts this morning. So, I want to ask this question from the very beginning. Question for us today: "Is it possible for pride in our own nation to keep us from being a part of God's purpose in all nations?" Is it possible for pride in our own nation to keep us from being part of God's purpose in all nations?

I've told the story before here, and it's in that little orange book out there, but it's worth retelling again this morning, just because it illustrates so well this tendency. I've told this story before of going to one particular church before I had come to Brook Hills. I was going to preach that Sunday morning on making disciples of all nations. On Saturday night, Heather and I were sitting around with the pastor and his wife, two deacons and their wives, and we were telling them about the opportunities that we...I...had in going to different countries that are not easy to go into, countries where people are often times opposed to Christianity, opposed to the gospel, difficult countries.

We're sharing about this with one of these guys, when one of the deacons sat up in his chair and said, "Dave, I think it's great that you're going to all of those places, but if you ask me, I would just as soon God annihilate all those people and send them to hell." I know preachers have a tendency to exaggerate, but that's exactly what he said. "I would just as soon God annihilate all of them and send them to hell." You ask me what I said in response? I didn't say anything. I was stunned into silence. I didn't know what to say.

The conversation ended up going on like nothing had happened, and I thought, "Okay, I'm going to preach on making disciples of all nations tomorrow, and this is going to be interesting." So, I got there on Sunday morning, I was there on the front row, and before I got up to preach, the pastor got up and he was kind of welcoming folks, and I don't know what sparked it; it was not the fourth of July, but something patriotic was aroused in him, and he began to talk about how there is no chance he would ever live anywhere outside of the United States. He talked about how proud he was to be an American, and how thankful he was to live in this country and not in another country, and "Amens" were firing

throughout the room, and I thought, "All right, I'm about to preach on going to all nations." So, I preached...I hope, I pray...with as much grace as in me in Christ.

At the end, I was standing down in the front, and the pastor got up to close things out, and he said, "Before we leave, I want to say a couple of things." He said, "David, we just want you to know that we are so thankful for all these places that you're going, and we want to promise you this morning that we will send you money so that we don't have to go to those places ourselves." His exact words. Heather's hand comes up on my shoulder. She is standing behind me, like, she can tell. I don't know what she's putting her hand up on my shoulder like I'm about to run up and tackle the guy or something. I'm not sure.

However, sweat is just beating down my neck, and he continues, "At my last church..." these are his words... "At my last church, we had a missionary from Japan who came and spoke, and I told my church that if they didn't give to support this missionary in Japan, that I was going to pray that God would send their kids to go work with him in Japan." Like, it was a threat, and he said, "My church gave that guy a laptop, all these different things." Apparently, the threat worked.

I got into the car after that Sunday, and we drove away, and just the swell of emotions came over me. Anger and sadness and confusion. What if that deacon and that pastor simply said what most Christians in our context believe but are just not bold enough to say? You might think, "That's a little too harsh. Maybe a little too brash."

However, think about it with me. How many of us in this room have given serious thought, serious consideration, to the possibility of living in another nation for the glory of God? How many Christians in this room...how many of us have prayed and fasted and sought the Lord and said, "Do you want me to live...my family to live in another nation?" Or have we sat back and said, "We are content to write our checks and send our money so that we don't have to go ourselves?" How many of us in the room, as parents, are really praying and asking God to raise up our children to go to Afghanistan, and Sudan, and India, and China, and the Central African Republic, to take the gospel, even if that means they never come back? Obviously, I don't think that anyone of us would say, "Well, I'd just as soon annihilate all of those people and send them to hell.", but what are we saying with our lives if we sit back in the comforts of our country and never give second thought about how we might give ourselves to making the gospel known in those places? That is what the story of Jonah is all about.

A little background, 2 Kings 14:25...you don't have to turn there, but in 2 Kings 14:25, what we discover is that the word of the Lord came to Jonah, the prophet. He took that word to the king. The king of the Northern kingdom was Jeroboam, the Northern kingdom of Israel, and the word was, "You need to shore up your borders in the north to protect yourself, basically, from Assyria," which was a massive nation, Israel's greatest enemy in the north. So, the word came to Jonah, and he went to the king and said, "Shore up the borders." The king did so, and Jonah was, basically, a national hero, an Israelite of Israelites. He had brought the message that had brought freedom, so to speak, and more security from the Assyrians in the north.

If this book that we hold in our hands were all about national heroes in Israel, then Jonah would have been the top tale to tell. Unfortunately, though, that is not the story that was told of Jonah. Much, probably, to Jonah's chagrin, we have this story, instead, which tells a much different picture of God's heart, not just for one nation, but for all nations.

Jonah 1:1, *"Now the word of the LORD came to the Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, 'Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it, for their evil has come up before me.'"* Now, a little background here. I mentioned Assyria to the north of Israel. Assyrians were known, not just in Israel, but also among all these other nations for their sinfulness, for their arrogance, for their pride, and for their absolute brutality in war. They wouldn't just overtake other nations; they would slaughter other nations.

Listen to one account from a king; this was before even Jonah's time, but a king of Assyria who was talking about his spoils in war. He said, "Many of the captives I've burned in a fire. Many, I took alive. From some, I cut off their hands to the wrists. From others, I've cut off their noses, ears, and fingers. I put out the eyes of many of the soldiers. I've burnt their young men and women to death." This was the reputation of the Assyrians.

You'll never guess what the capital city of Assyria was? Nineveh, the arch-enemy of the Northern kingdom of Israel, known for their sinfulness and brutality. God comes to Jonah and says, "I want you, my prophet, to go and preach my message in the middle of Nineveh." Verse 3 says, *"But Jonah rose..."* Whenever you see a command from God followed by the word, "but," you know something is wrong. *"But Jonah rose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD. He went down to Joppa and found a ship going to Tarshish. So he paid the fare and went on board, to go with them to Tarshish, away from the presence of the LORD."*

I used to live in New Orleans. If you could picture it this way: if you're in New Orleans, and the Lord were to come to you and said, "Go to Atlanta.", this would be the equivalent of going down the port in New Orleans, and instead of heading toward Atlanta, getting on a ship that is headed to Mexico. Jonah is going the exact opposite direction, geographically and spiritually. He is running from the presence of the Lord and this spirals downward. The text even emphasizes it. He goes down to Joppa, where he finds a ship and goes down to the bottom of the ship where he lies down to go to sleep. So, he is running from God.

On that ship, we know, a storm comes...massive storm, and these pagan sailors on the boat are praying to every single god they can think of to try and get out of this mess. They are trying to figure out what has brought this upon them. The captain goes down to where Jonah is sleeping, and he says, "Get up." Jonah comes up; it doesn't take him long to realize that this storm has nothing to do with these pagan sailors. This storm has everything to do with this disobedient prophet. So, it becomes clear that he is the reason for the problem and Jonah is thrown overboard, and as he sinks into the depths of the sea, the waters around the boat go calm and the storm ceases. The sailors aboard the ship worship the Lord of Jonah, while Jonah sinks to the depths of the sea.

Well, at that moment, Jonah 1:17, *"The LORD appointed a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights."* Now, we don't know all the details here. We don't know if this is a whale or just a really big fish. It's interesting; there are all kinds of attempts at natural explanations to what has happened here. The reality is this is supernatural. It is not often that someone gets eaten by an aquatic animal and lives in the belly for a few days in the midst of fish intestines, and fish blubber, and fish waste for a little quiet time with the Lord. That doesn't happen often thankfully. It happened here for three days. Jonah is the middle of a fish's belly and, during that time, he prays. Jonah 2, you look at this prayer...we don't have time to read, but nine verses, he prays to God, climaxing with "Salvation belongs to the Lord." He knows that God is saving him. However, what's really interesting is that when you look at that prayer, you see one conspicuous omission. At no point in the prayer do you see Jonah expressing contrition,

even confession, for his sin. You do not see him at any point in his prayer repenting for the sin that has gotten him into the fish's belly in the first place.

So, in Jonah 2:10, the Lord spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah out upon the dry land. Not a pretty picture. If you could only imagine what it might look like to see a man vomited onto the beach by a fish; all kinds of chunks of tuna and seaweed, and a man. To see him...doubtless, people saw this, and if they didn't see it, they smelled this. Jonah gets up and begins to walk and is surrounded by people, and doubtless the story begins to be told, "This a man who just spent three days in a fish; I don't believe it, look at the guy." The story is told. Here is a man who has been three days in a fish and is alive. He goes to Nineveh in Jonah 3.

Now, a little more background about Nineveh. The name Nineveh, literally, meant "fish town." The history of the city of Nineveh tells us that there was a time in their polytheism...the worship of many, many different gods...that a Greek god that was half fish, half man, had come to Nineveh from the sea, bringing all kinds of arts and sciences to the city.

So now, under the sovereignty of the one true God, the swallowable prophet comes to the city, fish town, and he preaches a simple eight-word sermon of doom and judgment. "Forty days," Jonah says, "And the Lord is going to destroy you." At no point in his message does he say "But the Lord will forgive you; the Lord will relent from the destruction He is reigning on you if you repent and turn to Him." Instead, it is just doom and just judgment. However, by the grace of God, the people of Nineveh do end up turning. The people hear the message. The king hears the message. He calls out to all the people, "We need to repent and fast." He even tells the animals to fast.

So, you've got everyone and everything in the city of Nineveh repenting, turning to God. It says in Jonah 3:10, "*When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God relented of the disaster that he had said that he would do to them, and he did not do it.*" Now, this is where we expect the story to end, happily ever after. Jonah, we presume, has been obedient. The people of Nineveh have repented, but the reality is after three chapters, the stage is now just set for the main point of the book of Jonah in Jonah 4.

Listen to what happened when the city repented. Jonah 4:1, "*But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry.*" What is that? The prophet preaches, the people turn to God, and the prophet is mad. This is where we see, for the first time, the reason why Jonah disobeyed God and ran away from Nineveh. Verse 2, "*And he prayed to the LORD and said, 'O LORD, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country? That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster.'*"

Did you catch that? Jonah ran away from Nineveh, not because he was afraid of failure in Nineveh; he ran because he was afraid of success in Nineveh. He knew this would happen, and he's angry. It's almost like he's looking in the face of God and saying, "I knew you would show your love to them. Why did you show your love to them? This is why I don't want to obey you in the first place." Verse 3, he says, "*Therefore now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live.*" He's sulking in verse 5. He "*went out the city and sat to the east of the city and made a booth for himself there. He sat under it in the shade, till he should see what would become of the city.*"

While this entire city is turning in repentance to God, the prophet is not in the middle of them, leading them in prayer and worship of God. Instead, he goes sulking out of the city,

sits in the shade and watches to see what's going to happen next. Verse 6, *"Now the LORD God appointed a plant and made it come over Jonah, that it might be a shade over his head, to save him from his discomfort. So Jonah was exceedingly glad because of the plant."* Jonah has gone from exceedingly mad in verse 1, when the people and the city repented, to exceedingly glad when a plant gave him some shade.

Listen to what happens next when dawn came up the next day, verse 7, *"God appointed a worm that attacked the plant, so that it withered. When the sun rose, God appointed a scorching east wind, and the sun beat down on the head of Jonah so that he was faint. And he asked that he might die and said, 'It is better for me to die than to live.' But God said to Jonah..."* this is the second time He's asked this question, *"Do you do well to be angry..."* and this time he says, *"...for the plant?"* And he said, *'Yes, I do well to be angry, angry enough to die.'*

Then, we come to verses 10 and 11, the two most important verses in the book. *"And the LORD said, 'You pity the plant, for which you did not labor, nor did you make it grow, which came into being in the night and perished in a night. And should not I pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also much cattle?'"* God says to Jonah, "Jonah, you are concerned about a plant, when there is a people, whom I have created and crafted with my own hand, and I have shown my mercy and love to them, and you want nothing to do with it because you're more concerned about this plant."

The story doesn't end with a happily ever after. Instead, the story ends with a haunting question from God that resounds, "Yes", in Jonah's heart, but also resounds in the heart of God's people in this day, and the question that resounds all across this room among God's people today. What's the point of this story, and what does God desire to teach us as His people today, through this story?

What We Learn About God...

His sovereign control ...

Well, first, see what we learned about God in Jonah. Three characteristics of God all over this book. Number one, His sovereign control. In this book, there is a beautiful interplay between the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of man. We see man...we see people making all kinds of decisions, running away from God in Jonah. Sailors worshipping multiple different gods. Nineveh, doing everything they want to do, and then finally repenting. Jonah walking out and sulking. We've got people responsible for their actions.

At the same time, we see a God who is sovereign over every single detail in this story. He is sovereign over nature. God is sovereign over nature. Jonah 1:4, *"The LORD hurled a great wind upon the sea..."* The Lord did that. Verse 17, *"The LORD appointed a great fish to swallow up Jonah."* Jonah 2, *"The LORD spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah out upon the dry land."* God said, "Vomit," and it vomited. Jonah 4:6, *"The LORD God appointed a plant..."* Verse 7, *"God appointed a worm..."* Verse 8, *"God appointed a scorching east wind..."* Do you see it? God is sovereign over the movement of the wind and the movement of worms. He is sovereign over storms, and God is sovereign over vomit. He's sovereign over it all. There is not one detail in creation that is not ultimately under the sovereign control of God.

See His sovereignty over nature and over nations in this entire book. It is God who holds the fate of Assyria in His hands. If God wants to destroy it, then He will destroy it. If God wants to relent and not destroy it, He will relent and not destroy it. He's not just sovereign over a pagan nation like Assyria; He is sovereign, also, over His prophet. Which is actually, really, really, really good news. Not just for Jonah or the people of God then, but for every single one of us in the room as the people of God now. Because the reality is, because God has sovereign authority over all nature, all nations, and all things, in heaven and on earth, then we can realize that God's people cannot outrun God's pursuit.

God has the forces of nature and nations at His disposal, and you, man or woman of God, you cannot outrun your God. That's really good news. It's good news whenever we think about Jonah's running...the reality is Jonah's running is a picture of every single time we sin, isn't it? Turning from God. "Oh no, I'm going to do this instead." We praise God in this room that, when we are unfaithful, He is faithful still. The people of God cannot outrun the pursuit of God. That's good news.

His merciful compassion ...

His sovereign control leads to His merciful compassion. See the wonder and wideness of His mercy in this book. Everybody in this book is messed up. Jonah is messed up. The sailors worshipping all these different gods...messed up. The city of Nineveh is royally messed up, but we see the mercy of God coming to all of them. We see His mercy toward sinful pagans, toward sailors, who are worshipping all kinds of different gods. They deserve to be thrown overboard with Jonah, and yet, the Lord in His mercy brings them to worship Him.

It's a startling verse in Jonah 1:16 when he brings these pagan sailors to worship the one true god, Yahweh, the God of Israel. The whole city of Nineveh...think about it...for years, for generations, sinfulness, arrogance, pride, brutality, for year after year after year after year, and in a moment, those people turn to God and He relents from their destruction.

It's mercy toward sinful pagans, and mercy toward selfish prophets. God shows mercy, not just to the irreligious, but He shows mercy to the religious. He shows mercy, not just to the unrighteous, but He shows mercy to the self-righteous. Isn't it good that God's capacity to forgive is greater than our capacity to sin? We are great sinners in this room, but we have a greater Savior in this room. Greater than our sin is His ability to save.

His global concern ...

See His sovereign control, His merciful compassion, all-leading to God's global concern. It is clear in this book that God loves His people. He loves His people. Jonah is exhibit A. Among all the people in the book that deserve the love and mercy of God, the least, Jonah, is at the top of that list. He is running from God, and at no point do we see him repenting and turning to God like we see the pagan sailors and the pagan city do.

So, God loves His people, but what we've seen ever since we began reading the Bible this year is true, and really comes to a head in the book of Jonah. God loves His people for the sake of all peoples. What God said to Abraham in Genesis 12 is still in place in Jonah 4. "Abraham, I'll bless you, so that you might be a blessing to all nations. It's not just about the people of Israel...the nation of Israel; it's about all nations knowing my grace and my mercy and my goodness." That's coming alive here in Jonah 4.

God loves His people for the sake of all peoples, but it's what we have seen throughout the Old Testament, isn't it? Over and over and over again, God's people are disconnecting His blessing to them from His purpose for them. They are content over and over again just to sit back and receive the blessing of God and not make the glory of God known in all nations.

It's not just the Old Testament; we will see it in the New Testament, and we see it all throughout church history. Brothers and sisters, we need to see the record that goes before us: the global purpose of God has always faced resistance from the nationalistic people of God. It's clear in the people of Israel in the Old Testament, but even when we get into the New Testament, and we see this division between Jews and Gentiles. "Should we even let the nations into the church?", and then you look in the history of the church, and you see people saying things...leaders, pastors...saying things like, "Why do we need to take the gospel to the heathen in India? God will save them if He wants to. We need to stay here." You see a resistance all throughout the history of God's people to God's purpose. At every turn, we see God far more concerned about His glory in all nations than His people are.

What We Learn About Jonah...

This is what we learn about God, and that leads to what we learn about Jonah, because this is what God is teaching to Jonah: His sovereign control, His merciful compassion, and His global concern. That's really the point of what He's doing...what God is doing in the book of Jonah. The point is not just to bring this about in Nineveh. If that were the point...if Nineveh was the focus of this book, then after Jonah ran, God would have found a more reliable prophet on the spot, and somebody else would of gone to preach to them. They would have come to repentance, and that is where the book would have ended. Instead, what we have is this story about God forming the heart of His prophet.

He wanted his way more than he wanted God's will.

What needed to be formed in Jonah? Well, first, he wanted his way more than he wanted God's will. Jonah's plan for his life was not about to be trumped by God's purpose in the world. He had his face set on his direction, his course, captain of his own fate and soul, and he was going to determine what his life was going to look like, not God. Up to the very last verse in the book, we still see Jonah more interested in his way than in God's will.

He desired the good of his nation more than he desired the gospel in other nations.

Second, Jonah desired the good of his nation more than he desired the gospel in other nations. Jonah was a national hero for the word that he brought to Jeroboam. He wanted to maintain that; for God to come and say, "Now, you go to Assyria, where we just built this border to protect us from. You go to them and preach a message..." that he knows is going to bring their salvation, their deliverance. Jonah says, "Absolutely not. I want the good of Israel more than I want to good news to go to that nation." Which is...it's interesting. You go back to Jonah 1:9, the first words we see from Jonah in the entire book. Listen to what he says, verse 9. He said to them...these sailors, "*I am a Hebrew...*" His first words. In the middle of a storm, raging around them, threatening to kill them, his first identification is, "I am a Hebrew." His pride in his own nation, his desire for the good of his own nation, trumped his desire for the gospel in other nations.

He knew the character of God in his head, but he ignored the compassion of God in his heart.

Third, he knew the character of God in his head, but he ignored the compassion of God in his heart. You look at Jonah's prayer in Jonah 2, and then what Jonah says in Jonah 4:2, when he says, "I knew you are a gracious God, a merciful God, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love." He is quoting directly from Exodus 34, where God has revealed His glory to His people when He gave them His law. He knows God in his head,

and, yet, he is more concerned about having shade in his seat than he is about that compassion. He knows that God has made Himself known to these people.

He was more concerned about his own empty desires than he was about others' eternal destinies.

Oh, to see the very prophet of God, who knows the depth of who God is in his mind, and yet, has no desire to see the compassion of God known in the world around him. Instead, he was more concerned about his own empty desires than he was about other's eternal destinies. Plainly put, Jonah cared more about a plant than he did about people. He cared more about shade, than he did about their salvation, and he was mad when this little thing went wrong, but he desired this entire city to perish under the judgment of God. More concerned about his empty desires than others' eternal destinies; more concerned about a plant than the destinies of hundreds of thousands of people for an eternity.

He failed to connect the mercy of God in his life with the mission of God in the world.

Which all brings us this final truth that we learn about in Jonah that sums it all up: He failed to connect the mercy of God in his life with the mission of God in the world. Jonah was fine to be a recipient of mercy, crying out in Jonah 2:9, "*Salvation belongs to the LORD!*" However, he was unwilling to extend that mercy to others. He was fine experiencing the mercy of God in his life, but he wanted nothing to do with the mission of God in the world. Now, this is not the most shining example of a prophet that we see in the Old Testament. However, lest we are too hard on Jonah, I want us to look at these things we learn about him, and just ask the question, "Are these things tendencies in our own hearts as well?" Are there times when we want our way more than we want God's will? Where we are not interested in where He wants us to go, or what He wants us to do because we already have our plans set up.

Is it possible for us to sit back and enjoy the good life in our nation without giving second thought to how God might want to use us to make the gospel known in other nations? This is, basically, the default setting in our churches in this context. Is it possible for you in this room to know the character of God in our heads, and yet, lack the compassion of God in our hearts? Is it possible for us to study the Word for an extended time this morning, in this room, and yet, walk by someone tomorrow who may be on a road that leads to an eternal hell, and not even think twice about that?

Is it possible for us to be more concerned about empty desires and petty comforts, little things in our life here that get us all riled up and deafen us to the reality that we're surrounded in this great city and in the world with, literally, billions of people who are headed to an eternity without God? Have our affections so intertwined with little things that we lose sight of eternal realities? Is it a temptation for us in this room to sit back and soak in the mercy of God, and yet, give a mere tip of our hats, at best, to the mission of God in the world?

What We Learn About Jesus...

See in Jonah's heart a reflection of our own, but don't stop there. That would be depressing. Instead, see in the book of Jonah, what we are seeing all throughout the Old Testament, how he is pointing us, ultimately, to Jesus.

The contrasts ...

What do we learn about Jesus in this book? Well, think about it on two levels. First, when it comes to contrast between these two prophets, Jonah and Jesus, and again, I'm referring to Jesus as, not one prophet among many, but a prophet who is supreme and unique above and over all; our prophet, priest, and king. Think about...we have seen the selfishness of Jonah. We see how he reluctantly preaches to sinners in need of God's grace. Reluctance is a kind word. He is not wanting to go to Nineveh. So, he reluctantly preaches to sinners in need of God's grace. He is disobedient, even angry, pouting and sulking as he does, but, nevertheless, he goes to the city that is filled with his enemies, and there he preaches the Word of the Lord, and as a result, people in Nineveh are temporarily spared from the judgment of God.

That's the story we just saw when it comes to the prophet of Jonah, but it ultimately points us...this story...to Jesus as prophet, not as selfish prophet, but selfless prophet; the selflessness of Jesus. Instead of reluctantly, He relentlessly pursues sinners in need of God's grace. He is not reluctant in any way. He leaves His country, so to speak; His throne in glory. He humbles Himself, being found in appearance as a man. For the joy set before Him, He goes not just to a city; He goes to the cross for the sake of His enemies; for the sake of men and women who have actively rebelled against Him. Men and women, who are thrusting nails into His hands and His feet, rebelling against Him. He relentlessly pursues them on the cross, and as a result, people...not just in one nation, but people in all nations...can be eternally saved from the wrath of God.

As a result, anyone, in any nation in the world...and the reality is someone from every nation, tribe, tongue, and people in the world will be saved eternally from the wrath of God and experience His salvation. Jesus, indeed, is our great prophet and priest and king. Praise God for His selflessness!

The comparisons ...

So, there's the contrast. Are there any comparisons? This is where Jesus actually makes a comparison between Himself and the story of Jonah. Go with me to Matthew 12. I want us to turn to one place, Matthew 12:38, first book of the New Testament. Now, this conversation is recounted in a couple of different gospels, but the reason I want us to go to Matthew is because Matthew was writing to a primarily Jewish audience; writing to an audience that was tempted to sit back in nationalistic pride. It was tempted to sit back and think, "Well, maybe, Jesus has come, the Messiah has come just for the people of Israel."

So, Jesus is having a conversation with some religious leaders, and I just want you to hear what he says in Matthew 12:38:

Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered him, ["him" being Jesus] saying, "Teacher, we wish to see a sign from you." But he answered them, "An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. The men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, something greater than Jonah is here."

So, here's the deal. These religious leaders, they want a sign. "Give us proof that you are from God that what you are saying is true and is of God." Jesus says, "You guys are always looking for signs." We see this at different points throughout the Gospels, and He says, "You're not going to get a sign except for this: the sign of Jonah." What Jesus does is He

points back to the story of Jonah, and He says, "This is the same picture that will be reflected in me, and this is how you will know that I am from God. Look back at Jonah. Look at the miraculous rescue that happened there." Jesus is saying, "Jonah was alive after three days in a fish."

Like, we've talked about...most scholars believed that the people of Nineveh and "fish town" knew this guy had just spent a few nights in a fish. So, when he comes to Nineveh as the guy who just got spit up by a fish, that it makes sense for these people to listen. This guy is going to be a prophet from the one true God, saved from a fish by that one true God, preaching a message, and they responded and repented. That was, so to speak, the sign, the proof, the clear reality. "Nineveh, listen, this guy just spent three days in a fish. You need to listen to him."

So, Jesus says to these religious leaders looking for a sign, "You want to know that I'm from God?" Do you want to know even in this room today that Jesus is from God? He is alive after three days in the grave. That's a sign. It's one thing when a guy spends three nights in a fish and comes out talking. It's a whole other thing when a guy spends three days...and this phrase "three nights and three days" was used to refer to any portion of three days. The picture is it's one thing when a guy comes out of three days in a fish talking. It's another thing when a guy is put in a grave and a tomb. He's buried in that tomb, and He comes out talking. You listen to Him. That's what Jesus is saying. "They repented when they saw a guy who had been in a fish. If you don't repent when you have seen a guy who rises from the grave, then all the more judgment upon you."

He came out talking, what was he saying? The message that Jonah came out with, "Repent, for the judgment of God is coming. Forty days and God will destroy this city." Jesus came, and Matthew makes clear from the very beginning, Matthew 4:17, His initial message in this book...His continual message throughout this book, Jesus says, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near." What He says to them, then, and what He says to every single person in this room is if you are here today, and you have never turned from your sin and yourself to God, in Christ, through what He has done on a cross, to cover over your sins then the word for you from God today is, "Repent." Turn man or woman or student or child, turn from your sin and turn to God in Christ.

Well, you say, "What right does Christ have to call me to reorient my entire life around Him?" He died on a cross for your sins, and three days later, He was alive in victory over sin and death in the grave. That's the right He has to call you to repent.

The result: the king of Nineveh, the people of Nineveh, the animals of Nineveh, crying out to God for His deliverance, and the response is salvation for the Ninevites. The merciful response that is called for in Jesus' work is salvation for the nations. Not just salvation for a certain people; not just salvation for a certain nation, but salvation for all nations. That is why Jesus came to die, rise, preach repentance and call the nations to turn to God. Which leads to the challenge for us.

The Challenge for Us...

Let's surrender our lives to the Great Commission, no matter what that means.

Okay, we've come from a story, an Old Testament prophet, to the story of our New Testament Prophet, Savior and King in Christ. So, what does this mean for us? For every single one of us in this room who has been saved by a selfless Christ on a cross, for every

single person in this room who used to be an enemy of God in your sin, and yet, He pursued you in his mercy, and He outran your capacity to sin, and He forgave you of your sin, and He has drawn you to Himself, what does this mean for us? Let us then surrender our lives to the Great Commission, no matter what that means.

We talked about Jonah turning to his way away from God's will, and our tendency to the same thing, but it's not just our ways in general and God's will in general. What was God's will for Jonah? Two commandments: Go and preach. Go and preach. Well, you say, "That was God's will for Jonah. What's God's will for us?" God's will for us...Matthew 28:19, later on in this same book, two commands: Go and preach. Make disciples of all the nations. There is a clear parallel between God's will for Jonah, and God's will for every single one of our lives in this room, to go and preach the gospel to all nations. To give each of our lives in this room, all of our lives collectively together as a church, towards this command. Go and preach the gospel to all nations, so may it not be said of you, or me, or us that with this command from God, we sat back and made excuses for why we would not go to other nations. It is the same indictment that we see in Jonah that could be even more so upon us who know Christ. Let us surrender our lives to the Great Commission, no matter what that means.

Let's live for the gospel to spread to all nations more than we long to be safe, secure, and satisfied in our own nation.

Let's live for the gospel to spread to all nations more than we long to be safe, secure, and satisfied in our own nation. Yes, we have freedoms here, glorious freedoms given to us by the grace of God, and gifts that flow from those freedoms, but that does not mean our lives are supposed to be spent here. Our identity is not primarily as Americans.

Now, I want to risk for a second ruining your fourth of July by asking you this question: "Have you in your life asked God what nation He wants you to live in, and waited for Him to answer?" Have you said to God, "I, my family, will live in any nation, among any people, you just show us where. If it is Iraq, we will live there. If it is South Africa, we will live there. If it is Nepal, we'll live there. If it's Saudi Arabia, we'll live there. My way, our way, is submissive to your will."

I know the immediate thought is, "Well, pastor, we're not all supposed to move to other nations." I'm not saying that we all are supposed to move to other nations, and the Bible is not saying that we all are supposed to move to other nations. However, the Bible is saying that for every single follower of Christ in this room, we hold to our national ties very loosely in this world. We are citizens of another country, a heavenly country, and that is where our citizenship belongs, not in The United States of America. As a result, our lives are His to spend from the day we are sitting here now, until the day when we experience that country. Our lives are His to spend wherever He wants us to be, and it is incumbent upon every follower of Christ in this room to put our lives with open hands, a blank check before the Lord, and say, "We will go wherever you want us to go." To not do that is to live in the shoes of the prophet Jonah for all of your Christian life. Undoubtedly, God will say to some, if not many of us, "I want you to live in the United States, and I want you to live in Birmingham, or somewhere in the United States for the sake of my glory and all nations." He will say to others, "I want you to live in this nation, or that nation."

I have seen a couple of families that have gone out in the last year or so from this faith family this morning. I talked to other families who are staying here and leveraging businesses. I talked to one after the service...9:00 AM worship gatherings...saying that, "We're trying to figure out how we can use these resources we've been given to make the glory of God known in all nations." This looks different in all our lives, but what is necessary

by the grace of God from all our lives is a blank check on the table that says, "We want to spread the gospel to all nations more than we want to be safe, secure, and satisfied in this nation."

Let's ask God to fill our heads with His truth from the Word and our hearts with His love for the world.

Let's ask God to fill our heads with His truth from the Word and our hearts with His love for the world. Let us not fool ourselves and study the Word of God week in and week out here, and not fall before God and say, "Help me to see what you see in the world. Help me to feel what you feel in the world. Help me to desire what you desire in the world." God, may it be said of The Church at Brook Hills that we were as passionate about the glory of God in all nations as He is. May that heart, God, be ours. Your heart be our heart.

Let's forsake comforts, care, and concerns in this world for the sake of souls in the world to come.

Let's forsake comforts, cares, and concerns in this world for the sake of souls in the world to come. Let us not become so consumed with trivial things that do not matter. Let us not, in this room, be known for valuing plants, and possessions, and sports, and entertainments, and new gadgets, and nice things, and stuff in this world. Let us not be known as people who get worked up over these little things, the comforts that get taken away from us when things don't go quite the way we planned. Let us have a perspective that sees these tiny things in reality of this mammoth truth: we are surrounded by people in this city and people in all nations whose eternity is at stake, and we have been given the mercy of God to make the gospel of God known among them.

Let's use the grace of God in us for the glory of God around us.

So, let us use this grace He has given us, the grace of God in us, for the glory of God around us. Do we realize, in this room, that we have no right to the favor of God? We have no merit that warrants the mercy of God. I think about my own life. I think about the reality that I was born into a context where the gospel is readily accessible. I have heard about the death of Christ on the cross, practically, since the day I was born, and as if that were not great enough, I've also been born into a context where I've never, since the day I was born, had to worry about clean water, or food, or medical care. I'm humbled by the reality that I had nothing to do with where I was born. All of these things are pure evidences of the measurable grace of God toward me. I did nothing to earn those things.

I'm even more humbled when I consider that there are nearly two billion people in the world today have been born into contexts where the gospel is not there. They are born into families where, for generations, their ancestors have been born, have lived, and have died without ever hearing that Jesus died on a cross. Some of them born into contexts where there is no clean water or guarantee of food, and the reality of that, they had nothing to do with where they were born either.

Now, I'm not going to presume to know the mind and motives of God, or probe the mysteries of God in all this, but I will say this, based on the authority of God that we are seeing in His Word: to recipients of immeasurable mercy all across this room, you have the gospel. You and I have resources more than the overwhelming majority. Even the poorest in this room are incredibly wealthy compared to the world. We have been shown mercy. Let us not then disconnect His mercy in our lives from His mission in this world. He has given us mercy for a reason, for a purpose, and it is not to sit back in the shade and enjoy our comforts, and complain when they're not there. It is to give our lives to the spread of His glory to the ends of the earth. No matter what comforts that means we lose, and no matter

what safety and security that means we have to sacrifice. This is the purpose of our lives on this planet.

God give us your concern for this city, for the people we pass by everyday in this city. Use us as your spokesmen with the message of grace and hope and life and repentance. Turn to God. God, may these words be on our lips in this great city, and God use us amidst the great needs of the nations. Help us to see what you see, and feel what you feel, and obey what you have said. Help us to go and preach the gospel to the ends of the earth.

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