

Jonah 4:1-11

Jonah: Man On The Run
What's Your Priority?

I don't know if you heard about this or not, but there's some kind of football game or something going on this afternoon. Does anybody know anything about that?

Some people could care less about football. You could ask them who they're rooting for today and they don't even know who's playing. They don't care.

But for a whole bunch of people the Super Bowl is a big deal.

Tickets cost thousands of dollars, with one offer this past week asking 125,000 dollars for a suite holding 20 fans. Internet bids for a pair of good tickets topped \$15,000.

Nearly half of all Americans are expected to tune in for the game, which is also being broadcast to 225 countries and territories. Advertisers will shell out 2.4 million dollars for a 30-second spot during the game.

Carrie Welling, an expectant mother in Pittsburgh didn't want to take the chance that she'd be in the hospital for Super Bowl Sunday so she talked her doctor into inducing her early.

She didn't have to though, Alexandria Joella Welling came early on her own. Her middle name, Joella, comes from three Steelers: "Joe" for Joey Porter, "El" for Antwaan Randal El , and "A" for Allan Faneca.

You know the word "fan" is actually a shortened version of the word fanatic. The Welling family are definitely fans! There's no question about what heads the priority list at their house.

How about you this morning? What's priority one in your life?

For the past few weeks we've been on a journey through the Old Testament book of Jonah.

Jonah was a man who knew God, who loved God, but who ended up running from God.

The guys who duplicate the CDs said they've inundated with requests for these messages. I believe that's because I'm just like the greatest preacher in the world.

No! I believe that's because the lessons of the book of Jonah resonate so deeply with all of us. All of us can hold up the book of Jonah like a mirror and lo and behold, there we are.

There's some of Jonah in all of us. That's why this book speaks to us like it does.

Today we're going to look at the last chapter of Jonah so turn to **Jonah 4, pg. 817**

This was somewhere around 760 BC at the time when the nation of Israel was divided into 2 kingdoms. The northern section was known as Israel and the southern part was called Judah.

Jonah lived in Israel and God used him to bring His message to the people.

That means that Jonah was a godly, trustworthy, faithful man. He knew the Bible and he loved God.

But here's what happened. God said, "Jonah, I want you to go to Nineveh and tell them God says to straighten up or He's going to flatten you."

Nineveh was the capitol of the warrior nation of Assyria. The Assyrians were the blood thirsty enemies of Israel.

The last great king of Assyria was Ashurbanipal, who not only extended the empire, but assembled a library of tablets of all the literature of Mesopotamia. That library was in Nineveh. Archeologists have unearthed thirty thousand tablets which are our single greatest source of knowledge of Mesopotamia culture, myth, and literature.

Jonah was from a little hick town called Gathhepher which was up in the hill country to the north in Palestine.

God said "Go," and Jonah said, "No."

So God pursued Jonah until He finally brought him to the place where Jonah was obedient.

Jonah goes to Nineveh, proclaims God's impending judgment, and lo and behold, the Ninevites listen and humble themselves before God.

Now that brings us to chapter 4.

Let me just say this before we actually look at the passage.

If you're really not religious and you just came along today because a friend invited you, or your looking into Christianity but you're not sure yet I have to tell you this is going to be true confession time for us Christians.

If you've stayed away from church in the past because you thought the church was full of hypocrites when you leave here today you're going to know for sure it's full of hypocrites. In fact, you're going to know that the pastor is a hypocrite.

Today were going to expose something none of us are proud of, but we need to be honest about.

So Christians, buckle your seat belts.

First thing we'll see to day is this: *God Is A God Of Mercy*

Read vs. 1

What displeased Jonah? **Read 3:5 and 3:10**

If you were around for the beginning of Jonah you'll remember that Jonah made up his mind to run from God and avoided prayer. When we're on the run we really don't want to talk to God.

Jonah didn't pray till God corralled him in the fish's belly.

But now listen to this. Jonah finally heads to Nineveh and accomplishes his mission. The wicked Ninevites say, "We're wrong, God forgive us," and God does.

Now Jonah is indignant. He's angry with God. So he prays again. **Read vs 2-3**

Jonah has tremendous insight into God's character. He said, "I knew this would happen! God, I knew if you sent me there you had something up your sleeve. I knew

you were going to work in the hearts of those Ninevites. I knew Your gracious and you don't like to judge people. God, just kill me."

Now you say, "What's with this guy? Why isn't he happy?"

I guess the closest we could come to was if Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri said "We're sorry about 911 and beheading all those people in Iraq we've changed."

Some of you would not be real happy with seeing them walk free. Including me.

Assyria was Israel's most brutal enemy. To Jonah God was letting them off the hook and Jonah was ticked.

And he says to god, "So just kill me, why don't you."

What would he say that? Because he has to go back home eventually. What's he going to say to people?

Everybody's going to say, "Jonah, where have you been?" And he's going to say well, after this fish swallowed me and spit me back out I went to Nineveh."

"Nineveh! And you got out alive. It must have been awful. How'd you do it Jonah? We're you doing like a secret mission thing?"

And Jonah's going to say, "Actually God sent me there to warn them of His judgment, which I did, and they listened, and He spared them."

That wouldn't go over real big.

So Jonah's is indignant. He's angry. He's depressed. He's emotional. He's upset. So now look what God says:

Read vs 4

"Jonah, you of all people. A Jew and one of my prophets." Israel was God's chosen nation. They were on the receiving end of tremendous blessing and privilege.

But it wasn't because they deserved it.

Listen to this. This is God's explanation: *"For you are a holy people to the LORD your God;*

the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth. The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples; but because the LORD loves you..." Deuteronomy 7:6-7

The only reason Israel was God's special nation was because God is gracious and merciful.

So God is saying, "You're going to be angry because I spared Assyria? How is it that you're going to tell me that I can't do for others what I did for you and your people?"

I. God Is A God Of Mercy

II. We Are Often Self-Focused

Read vs 5

Just in case in case, Jonah sits on the hill. Just in case God finally gets it and rains fire and brimstone down on Nineveh Jonah wants to have a front row seat.

Now follow this. **Read Verse 6**

This is the only time in the Book of Jonah that Jonah's ever happy.

It was hot out there in the sun. I don't know what month this was but the average temperature in that area in July is 108. That's the average, just ask our troops who have spent time in northern Iraq, which is where Nineveh was located.

In the blazing heat as Jonah sat under his little makeshift lean-to God did something. He caused a special plant to grow up at an accelerated rate to provide shade for Jonah. We can't know for sure, but most Hebrew scholars believe the word translated "plant" here refers to the castor oil plant which has huge broad leaves.

Whatever it was, it provided excellent protection from the scorching sun.

But **Read 7-8**

Jonah was elated that God provided the plant but by morning it was gone. Jonah woke up to find his beloved plant lying on the ground, shriveled and withered. All the work on an insignificant worm.

Did you ever read Richard Scarry books to your kids? My favorite character was Lowly Worm.

Maybe that's who God used. A lowly worm.

Now the sun was beating down on Jonah's head.

Soon he was dehydrating, his eyes were burning, his lips were parched, his skin was getting scorched, and everything started spinning.

He had one day of comfort, now he's having heat stroke, so again he says, "That's it. I'm finished with all this. I've had enough. God kill me!"

In verse 4 God asked Jonah a question he never answered. Now God asks another probing question. **Read 9**

Can't you just see Jonah saying, "You're darn right it's OK for me to be angry. I'm completely justified. I'm right, God. I'm right, and You're wrong."

Here's Jonah completely self-focused and self-absorbed. He can not see past him self.

Now at this point you might be thinking, "What a character. This guy Jonah's a real piece of work."

But before you come down too hard on him I want you to think about our third point.

I. God Is A God Of Mercy

II. We Are Often Self-Focused

III. God Wants Us To Make His Priorities Our Priorities

When Jonah answered God "*It is right for me to be angry, even to death!*" it was almost as if he were taunting God. Maybe he was hoping God would lash out at him in anger and grant his wish.

But God's not about to take Jonah's life. In fact, Jonah's answer showed that God had him right where He wanted him.

Now God's ready to teach Jonah what he desperately needed to learn. Listen carefully, because this is where we come in.

Read vs 10-11

At last God asks His final question, and with that the book closes. God has the last word. Nothing more needs to be said.

He says, "Jonah, you had pity on the plant." NIV translates this "You have been concerned about this vine..."

"Concerned" is the operative word.

"Jonah, you're so concerned with a temporary plant that you had nothing to do with raising. A plant that's literally here today and gone tomorrow."

"Listen to yourself Jonah. You're willing to die over something temporary and you're going to fault me for caring about a whole city full of people who will live eternally either in heaven or in hell."

"People who are made in my image, that I created, that I love! You got it right when you said I'm a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, One who relents from doing harm."

"In fact Jonah, you hate these people for their wickedness but what about the 120,000 who are so young they don't know their right from their left yet. How about the innocent children? We're you on the edge of your seat waiting to see me vaporize them? Would that have made you happy?"

"In fact, what about the livestock? You're such an environmentalist that your upset about a plant. At least have compassion on the bovine population." I may be wrong on this one, but I think that's a little inspired sarcasm."

Listen to what God is saying here. He's saying' "Jonah your concerned about the wrong things. You're concerned those Ninevites they get what they deserve. That they get what you think they deserve."

"You know what I'm concerned about? I'm concerned about making sure that nobody gets what they deserve. I've invited you to be a partner in the process but you're so concerned about the wrong stuff that you can't line up with what I'm doing."

Now here's where all this starts getting personal.

The Bible tells us that from the beginning God may a way for rebellious people to be forgiven. It started in the garden of Eden where he covered Adam and Eve with animal skins.

They disobeyed God, realized they were naked and made themselves aprons out of fig leaves.

God confronted them with their disobedience but then instead of killing them He slaughtered animals and made them clothing out of the skins.

Right there God was laying out the pattern.

To cover sin there had to be the death of an innocent substitute and God had to provide the covering.

Fast forward through centuries of Biblical history to the cross. Jesus Christ, the lamb of God lays down His life for sinful people, not to cover our sins but to pay for them. The people of the world stand on equal footing before their Creator. The Bible says, *"The LORD looks down from heaven upon the children of men, To see if there are any who understand, who seek God. They have all turned aside, They have together become corrupt; There is none who does good, No, not one."* Psalm 14:2-3

God's message to the world is, *"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved."*

Now I believe that's true. The evidence for the inspiration of the Bible is so overwhelming I can't help believe that's true.

And in a general way I'm concerned about whether other people believe in Jesus Christ.

But I'm going to admit to you, in the details of life, in the right now, in the moment, I have a little Jonah in me.

i can be far more concerned about whether the guy who changed my oil down Jiffy Lube got grease on my steering wheel than I am about the guy.

I can get agitated and concerned about stuff that's temporary and skip right over people who're going to spend eternity somewhere.

The cashier at the supermarkets too slow. The contractor doing my addition made a

mistake. The server at the restaurant messed up my order and I can't find her to get it straightened out.

This temporary stuff absorbs our time, our energy, our emotion. And the people who really matter, become a non-issue.

God says, "Jonah, Ed, people of Faith Community Church, I know you have a general concern for My eternal truth and the people of the world, but too often you're letting it get buried under your concern for the temporary.

God's goal for us is spiritual maturity. And that comes when your concerns sync up with the concerns of your heavenly father.

Jonah had his priorities all out of wack.

A while back I shared something with you that I had read and I thought was just the neatest idea. When you go to a restaurant after you give the server your order say something like this:

"Suzie, in just a minute we're going to pray and give thanks for the food and I was just wondering, is there anything I could pray for you?"

You'd be amazed at the doors of opportunity that God will open.

Sometimes they're so caught off guard they'll say, "I can't think of anything right now," and leave. In a minute or two they're back at your table saying, "Could you pray for my mom, she's going through chemotherapy right now."

Or, "I'm really struggling in school," or "I'm a single mom trying to provide for my kids and my paycheck always seems to be less than the bills."

We've had servers come back with another server that worked there and say, "Could you pray for him too?"

It's just a great way to break the ice to talk about spiritual issues and show people you care. At the end of the meal leave a clear gospel tract and a good tip.

There's nothing to that right? Anybody can do it. You don't need to be a Bible scholar or have the gift of evangelism. Just be real.

But I have a confession to make. There have been sometimes recently where there's just been a lot going on in my life and Sandy and I finally have some time alone to get a bite to eat, the server comes, introduces herself, takes my order, and I don't say a word.

And what concerns me, these issues that are important but temporary, come up and blur God's eternal concerns from my mind.

See, in general I believe all the right stuff.

*I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth.
And in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord; who was
conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead,
and buried; he descended into hell; the third day he
rose again from the dead; he ascended into heaven, and
sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty;
from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.*

I believe all that. But too often in the moment when it really matters and I get pressed up between what concerns God, and what concerns me, I choose me.

That's hypocrisy, isn't it?

Remember when I said if you've stayed away from church in the past because you thought the church was full of hypocrites when you leave here today you're going to know for sure it's full of hypocrites. In fact, you're going to know that the pastor is a hypocrite.

Here it is.

I don't want to spend my energy and emotion over stuff that's not even going to matter in the future, to the neglect of people that are going to matter for eternity.

Some of you pray for me regularly. I appreciate that. I mean that. I really appreciate that.

Let me give you a prayer request: I don't want to get caught up with all the temporary stuff. I don't want to grieve for people when people are what matters to God. I don't want *me* to be the top priority in my life.

Pray that in my life God's concerns would always outweigh my concerns.

Now some of you have been sitting through this whole service wondering, "What's up with the flower?"

We gave you all a carnation when you came in today. Probably some of the guys wouldn't take them but we tried. It has nothing to do with the sweetheart's banquet or Valentines day.

Here's what we want you to do.

Choose something that's a concern in your life that tends to slide up between your concern for people's eternal destiny.

For some of you it's your reputation. You're afraid of what people will think. You care about people, but you care more that they might think you're off the deep end talking about God and the Bible.

For some of you it's going to be your schedule. Your PDA is maxed out already and so business comes between you and the people around you.

For others it's a boy friend or a girl friend. They're so important to you you can't see past them.

For some it might even be your family. For most of us it doesn't seem like we have enough time for our families now, but for some the family always takes priority over people.

Sometimes our concerns are good things. What's yours today? If you were going to put a label on it what would it be?

What are you so concerned about that it comes before God's concerns and completely blocks your view?

God said to Jonah, let me clarify my concerns for you. I'm concerned about the people of Nineveh. It's a great city to me. It's full of people who need me.

What would God say to us? "My concern is the people of this generation. My concern is people who don't get it spiritually. I love them. I sent my Son to bleed for them."

I believe He'd say, "Be true to my Word, but do what it takes to impact this generation with my truth. Speak My truth in a language, with music, with media, what ever it takes, but speak to them in a way they can understand."

"Don't put your likes and dislikes above their need to hear from me. Make sure your not so concerned with your agenda, your temporary preferences, that My eternal truth gets entombed in them."

Here's what I want you to do with the flower. I want you to take it home, put it on the window in your kitchen, not in water, just on the window sill, and watch it this next week.

Watch it begin to loose it's beauty, to wither, and begin to decay. And as that's happening I want you to ask God that He would allow you to see the temporary stuff for what it really is.

That you'd see the passing that you have been prioritizing and allowing to stand in the way of God's real concerns.

If you're a believer this morning, aren't you glad that the person who introduced you to Jesus Christ put you as their concern, instead of their own agenda?

God is concerned with this generation. gracious and merciful God, slow to anger and abundant in loving kindness, One who relents from doing harm. That's why you're in His kingdom today. What's your greatest concern?

If you haven't yet believed, God is a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger and abundant in loving kindness. That's why He will forgive you and make you part of His eternal family if you'll trust in His Son.