

## Jonah Chapters 3-4 – John Karmelich

1. In this lesson, we're finish the story of Jonah, a Jewish prophet sent to the capital of a big foreign empire with a specific mission to get those living there to turn to God. Jonah didn't want this job, but God made His "executive incentive" plan clear (literally through a whale), so off he went. As I said in the last lesson, asking Jonah to go there, is like asking a Jewish prophet to be a witness for God during World War II and telling the Germans, "Stop it out or you'll all be dead in the next 40 days". That's how I picture Jonah's "missionary job". Anyway, after God's incentive plan finished, Jonah did as commanded. He traveled to a large city called Nineveh. It was the capital city of the largest empire of the world at that time. The miracle is that Jonah's preaching worked. While we don't know how the people in this city repented and turned to God, we just know they did. That story leads me perfectly to my lesson title: "Missionary life". My point is these chapters teach us a lot of how God interacts with us as we use our lives to be a witness for Him.
  - a) Let me give you the epilogue of the story first. Jonah was a success and the city repented and turned to God. That city was eventually destroyed about 100 years later by both the Babylonians and the Persians. Nineveh may have been the largest city in the world when Jonah was there. It was a 60 mile journey just to walk around the city. Anyway, within a three-day period Jonah walked around that city. While we don't know what he said as he went through the city, all we know is it worked and God spared that city for another 100 years more or less. Anyway, these two chapters get Jonah back on track and complete his missionary journey. Chapter 3 tells of the city's conversion and Chapter 4 is an epilogue of God explaining to Jonah why this missionary journey was needed.
2. One thing that puzzled me is why didn't the story of Jonah end at Chapter 3? If you've ever read this famous little story, Jonah was reluctant to go there, God did the "big fish thing" and the next thing we know Jonah's at Nineveh doing what God commanded him to do. By the time the third chapter ends, Nineveh repents, trusts in God and He holds off the judgment for about 100 years. My question is why have a chapter 4, if the happy-ending is at the end of chapter three?
  - a) The answer is my lesson title "Missionary life". One of the reasons God sends Jonah to the city of Nineveh isn't just to get that city to turn to God. The other reason is God's working on Jonah's heart to get him to trust His will and not Jonah's will for the rest of his life.
  - b) The reason I called this lesson "Missionary life" is to help us understand why He calls a lot of people to the missionary fields and what that means for their lives. Some famous tales exist of missionaries, who've "paved the way with their own blood" only to have others to lead a group to Jesus. My point is not every missionary endeavor is meant to go the way it does in this story. Missionary work is not just to lead nonbelievers to Jesus, it is also for the missionaries themselves to trust God with the work we believe He's called us to go do.
  - c) There are lots of questions here and I can't tackle all of them, so I'll start with fundamental missionary "101": How does one know where God is calling us? Let's face it, we don't get a big fish to spit us up in the right direction like Jonah. Many missionaries go to college to learn how to be missionaries and then get assigned to specific locations. Sometimes many just have a desire to go to place "x" and God and local churches make it possible. I recall a story of a young man who was sent to one of the most bug infested places in Africa. When asked why he picked that place, he said, "They have some of the best surfing in the world there, so I went where I could do what I enjoy doing and still make a difference for God!"
  - d) One thing I do enjoy on occasion is talking to people who've spent a significant portion of their lives in the "professional missionary field". Such people will often describe that their favorite part is learning to trust God through that experience. What I am getting at is such work is not just to lead people to Jesus, it's also helps us grow in our trust in God, through that process. OK then John, why haven't you traveled to some exotic place to do that type of work? The short answer is it's not what God's called me to do, so here I type!

3. Meanwhile, I did explain the reasons behind Chapters 3 and 4, but I forgot to discuss some of the key details. For example, Jonah walked around by himself through this large city. Whatever he said to those residents, it worked. The leader of that city was not the Assyrian Emperor, but that head guy did order everybody living there to repent and even ordered their animals not to eat or drink for some unspecified time period as to show their allegiance to the God of the Israelites. I'd say it was a successful missionary endeavor because the text said God relented from His planned punishment to those living there and we assume everyone there "lived happily ever after".
  - a) Chapter 4 is a strange epilogue. It describes Jonah somewhere east of the city. Apparently, Jonah was watching to see what God was going to do there. The chapter describes a plant that grew fast and became shade for Jonah. Equally as fast, worms ate that plant so it died soon afterwards. Jonah then pouted because he liked that plant. God then lectures Jonah that he should care about what He cares about, the lives of all people, not just Israelites.
  - b) Consider this story from God's perspective. We know that He wants all people to turn to Him for eternal life. That's why He set up the Nation of Israel in the first place, to be His witness to the world around them. After a long time, God "gave up on them" in the sense that the Christian church took over the role of being His witnesses to the world! As most of you know my theology by now, I don't believe God is finished with Israel as a unique entity, simply because He made unconditional promises to the Israelites to give them the land of Israel when Jesus returns to rule the world from there!
  - c) Speaking of seeing things from God's perspective, let me discuss the concept of "relenting" by God. How does a perfect God "relent" from His judgment? The answer is perspective! From our perspective, if we expect God to act a certain way like judging a nation that will destroy His chosen people (i.e., the Assyrians attacking Israel) and then it doesn't happen, we would say God "relented". To combine some history, one reason God "relented" was due to the fact the Israelites in the Northern Kingdom were collectively ignoring Him so God wanted to use the Assyrians as His instrument of judgment. History does record the destruction of Nineveh about 100 years later. We will get to why that happened when we study the Old Testament book of Nahum soon. The short version is God held off because that city did honor Him as God and that judgment was postponed for a fairly long time. It doesn't mean the Assyrians wore yamakas and studied the Old Testament. It just means that this city respected the God of the bible and believed in His existence.
4. OK bottom line time, Jonah, particularly the last two chapters is a great study on what it means to be a missionary for Jesus. Hopefully, we'll all learn a few things about what God expects of us as a witness for Him through these studies. With that said, let's begin.
5. Chapter 3, Verse 1: Then the word of the LORD came to Jonah a second time: <sup>2</sup> "Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you."
  - a) I have to admit, I am endlessly fascinated with the topic of how does God speak to us and how do we know when God's speaking to us? First, I don't believe we have to strain to be able to hear Him tell us something. I figure if God is God, He'll make it obvious what it is He wants to tell us. The next thing I like to emphasize is God hasn't lost any of our phone numbers. All I'm saying is I'm leery of people who tell me that God has a message for me. The next way we know if God is communicating something to us is He'll never command us to do something that violates His will. In most cases, His will is to use what talents we have and what we enjoy doing and find a way to combine that for His glory. I find that if we start down that path, God loves to lead us to specifics He wants for us. Missionaries I have met will tell me a lot of what they do they learned by trial and error of what worked!
  - b) The thing to get across is if God wants to tell us something, it'll become obvious what it is He wants us to know. It may be a desire. It may be a more blatant message. In summary, it's hard to describe how we know when God speaks to us, but we know it is if He makes it possible to accomplish that desire and He leads us down that path that He wants. Like I said, schools exist for missionaries and sometimes people just felt lead and go somewhere!

- c) All of that theology leads me back to Jonah. I don't know how God specified Nineveh as a destination to Jonah, but somehow God made it obvious to Jonah that's where He wants him to go. The text just says go to Nineveh and God said He will provide the right words to say once Jonah's there. The message was not fancy. Like I said in the introduction, I do picture Jonah with a sandwich board saying something like, "40 days and you're toast!"
6. Verse 3: Jonah obeyed the word of the LORD and went to Nineveh. Now Nineveh was a very important city--a visit required three days. <sup>4</sup> On the first day, Jonah started into the city. He proclaimed: "Forty more days and Nineveh will be overturned." <sup>5</sup> The Ninevites believed God. They declared a fast, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth.
- a) Yes you can read about Nineveh on Wiki, but let me save you a little time with some basic facts. The first is if you could measure along the walls around the city, it's about 60 miles in circumference. Some argue the population at the time of Jonah was 120,000. Some say it was closer to 600,000. Either way, it was a big city. It'd be in Northern Iraq today.
    - i) I also know it was destroyed by the Babylonians and the Persians. It stayed empty for centuries. An archeologist around 1850 "found" the ruins and it was rebuilt as a city. As far as I know it was not touched in the Iraq war, and it's nothing compared to what it was in its glory days all those millenniums ago.
  - b) With that said, let me come back to the topic of being a missionary. I'm pretty sure if some church wanted to be missionaries today, they'd start by planting a church somewhere in a large city and hope it grows from there. If a church wanted to canvas a large city like this one, they'd have groups canvassing neighborhoods with tracks describing Jesus.
  - c) My point is this "one-man marching band" accomplished more as a sole missionary than a large group effort would do today. My point is if God wanted to make it possible for one man to witness to a hundred thousand people or more all by himself, He can.
  - d) Does this mean Christian missionaries should use "Jonah" as a model of how to do it? The way I figure is if we're going to take on a project for God, start by doing what is logical or what we can and let God take care of what we can't do! My point here is just because God used a one-man operation with Jonah, doesn't mean He wants us to use that exact method all the time. The fact that God can do so much with just one man is the reminder that any accomplishment through missionary efforts is up to Him. Our job is just to be His witness to the world. I'm convinced we don't get points in heaven based on the number of people we lead to Jesus. Our job is just to be a witness for Him. The Holy Spirit works in people's hearts to produce results. Bottom line is missionary work is doing what's logical based on the situation in front of us, and use whatever resources are at our disposal. It's then up to God to do what we can't. A great joy of missionary work is watching God do what we are not able to do through our own power.
  - e) Meanwhile, Jonah did what he could as a "one-man marching band". He didn't have any tracts to pass out. He didn't hold a big Christian concert or make mass speeches. I picture Jonah just walking around town either yelling that God's judgment is coming soon or as I keep joking, he wore a sandwich board with a "repent or else" message.
    - i) The text mentions the fact it was a three-day's journey through the city. Yes I can make a big deal comparing the "three day" thing to Jesus being dead for that time, but I suspect the main point is that's how much time it took Jonah to cover all this territory before the "big wigs" in town said, we must respond to that preaching!
    - ii) I have no idea why the leaders of that city responded. Maybe it was the physical site of this "albino" walking around town. Maybe it is what Jonah said. All Jonah did know is that God told him to go preach there. I figure Jonah did what he was trained to do, which is to walk around this large city, preach repentance to realize the God who created all things loves them and wants them to turn from their ways of worshipping false gods as a start. I'm guessing Jonah was praying, "Please don't kill me" or "help my voice to last through this time period".

- f) Whatever the method, all we know is the results. The locals believed in a deity didn't rule over the whole world. Maybe it never occurred to them that there was a God who created everything that one could pray to. I just know they turned to God based on the preaching of Jonah. Remember he was reluctant and probably didn't care if this city repented or not. The fact that the residents of this large city did repent meant God accomplished His desire and Jonah was the chosen instrument for God to work through. To me, that is what life is all about, asking God what He wants us to do. For me, I try to be open about what He can desire of me, and I never assume it's a large or small scale thing. I just figure it's God's job to lead and mine to follow. This is why I daily prayer for His will to be done in my life. I must accept that answer even if it hurts me to do that will. I figure Jonah had that attitude at this point. It's like Jonah was thinking, "I'm not crazy about doing this, but if there's one thing I learned from the "fish thing", is that I must do what God wants me to do, period!"
- g) All of this leads to Verse 5. The verse said everyone in that city put on sackcloth and held a fast to God. "Sackcloth" is an uncomfortable garment. The idea is the locals realized the God of the Universe is upset at them, so they did what they normally do when one wants to express sorrow: Dress uncomfortable and hold off eating. Jonah did not organize bible studies to take the locals to the next step. He just did what God ordered him to do and he watched the results.
- h) Let me pause to remind people why Jonah hated the Assyrian Empire. They were famous for torturing and killing people who refused to be a part of their empire. They'd separate families forever. They would literally put fishhooks in people's mouths to drag them to a foreign land after defeating them. My favorite radio speaker Dennis Prager said he asked a man from Iraq, what's unique about your country? He said, we're the most cruel people in the world! I don't know if that's true, but their reputation from the Assyrians and from the Babylonians as well as ISIS today would fit that model! I'm not saying everyone who is from that area is cruel, I'm just saying their history of human cruelty is well earned.
- i) OK, since Jonah knew all of this, he didn't want their capital city to repent and turn to the God of the world. Jonah wanted judgment. That's why he ran away. Stop and think of a person or group we're not crazy about! We may think, "Well, if that's the way you'll treat me, let's just see what God's got in store for you!" My point is we have to see all people as needing Jesus as opposed to say, needing a punch in the face. On my better days, I'll try to keep that in mind when someone hurts me or someone I love. When I see someone who's acting horribly, the best thing I can do is pray for them as opposed to lashing out at them. I'm very aware there are exceptions to that rule and we have police for a reason! All I am saying is one of the functions of being a witness for Jesus, is to see people as needing Him, not just the people we care about or we think deserve to go to heaven!
- j) Well, I've been rambling for over a page on these verses, I'd say it's time to move on!
7. Verse 6: When the news reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, took off his royal robes, covered himself with sackcloth and sat down in the dust. <sup>7</sup> Then he issued a proclamation in Nineveh:
- a) From what history books I've read on this, the "head dude of the Assyrian Empire" wasn't there at that time, so the "king of Nineveh" was just in charge of that city, not the big and vast Assyrian Empire. Anyway, he heard about this man walking around town with that big sandwich board and he too wore sackcloth and sat in the dust. Without getting into a list of specifics about this ritual, let's just say it was uncomfortable and was their way that they showed remorse in the Middle East at that time! Since this guy was the head honcho he figured, I better do more than just wear this uncomfortable thing, I should make a big statement that the whole city should do what I am doing right now!
- b) One can't help but think "What did Jonah specifically do to get this reaction?" I'm positive the reason the bible doesn't give us Jonah's specific methods is so we don't try to replicate the exact method as if God can only work that way through specific people!

- c) Whatever the method, it worked. People were repenting and even the city officials joined in the action. With that said, let's see what the proclamation said:
8. Verse 7: "By the decree of the king and his nobles: Do not let any man or beast, herd or flock, taste anything; do not let them eat or drink. <sup>8</sup> But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth. Let everyone call urgently on God. Let them give up their evil ways and their violence. <sup>9</sup> Who knows? God may yet relent and with compassion turn from his fierce anger so that we will not perish."
- a) The more one thinks about this, the more amazing this miracle is, that an entire large city is repenting at the preaching of Jonah. This is a place that worshipped a local deity that I would describe as a "fish god". It shows what God can do in people's hearts to change to worship the true and living God and not some deity people made up!
- b) Here's another thing to consider. If these people repented, why did they still chose to go destroy the Northern Kingdom of Israel probably a short time after this? If they honored the God of the Jewish people, did they really change their ways? First, I am positive God put it in their hearts to go attack Israel as God had "had it up to here" with His people not honoring him. My point is that judgment was due and the Assyrians "happen to be in the neighborhood" and God used them for that judgment. The point of this repentance is the fact they now believed in the God who created all things, and this God is capable of anger in the sense that He could wipe out this city as easily as He allowed it to exist and grow!
- c) But John, the text says the proclamation was to give up their "evil ways and violence". I'd say that's a good reason not to attack Israel isn't it? I suspect that reference is to the cruel methods the Assyrians were known for throughout the Middle East. Let's put it this way, however long this repentance lasted, God did eventually judge that city and that empire for the harm they did to His chosen people. Nineveh did get completely destroyed about a 100-years in the future from the time Jonah preached there.
- d) All of that leads me back to the idea of God "relenting" on His judgment. For God to relent does not mean His judgment is "null and void". It can also mean He is holding off for just the moment due to repentance. Remember we have to separate individual judgment from group judgment. The issue here is group judgment and how that city acted as a group on the world around them. The issue for us is God holds believers to a higher standard! Our "group judgment" is how we act as a family, a church, a community or a city? What we do have to regularly ask ourselves is are we living as God desires we live and what can we be doing to change, if it's not the right thing to do? That's what this city was pondering as an order was given for all citizens to repent! While they may not know exactly what the God of the Universe demands of them, they knew that cruelty was part of their lifestyle and it's necessary for them to change in order to stay alive!
- e) One of the things that fascinated me about this text was how the city leaders also required that the animals refrain from food or eating. To state the obvious, the animals don't know what is going on. Why make them refrain from eating? Why go in the barn and take away their food? The answer is it wasn't for the animal's sake. It was to show God how serious the people were about trusting in God even to a point they restrain the things they own!
- f) By the way, if this order was posted around town, I'd suspect that Jonah took one of those notices and that's how he put that information in his book. The point is the whole city did do as the leaders requested and the whole city did repent.
- g) All of this repenting leads to the big question: Did it work? Verse 10:
9. Verse 10: When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he had compassion and did not bring upon them the destruction he had threatened.
- a) We're back to the issue of relenting. Since that city was not destroyed there on the spot, it became evident to that city that God did relent. That's how we know it didn't happen.
- b) All of this leads to a question I brought up in my introduction: Why not end the book here at this point? After all we have a "happily ever after" moment here in Verse 10.

- c) Before we move on to the next chapter, let me ask the important question: Can we cause God to relent today? My guess if He did it once, for all we know it may have happened a lot in history. So let me rephrase the question: If we're in a tight jam, can we pray to God that the situation may end well? Of course. As I explain every so often, I can't explain the reason God allows "this and that" and occasionally we'll hear of some amazing miracle as God responds in some other situation. To answer, first God is not a "genie in a bottle". It is our job to do His will and not vice versa! The only thing I know for sure is whatever it is believers go through, ultimately does work out for His glory. It doesn't mean we'll live through every disaster, but it means all things for believers do work out for God's glory.
    - i) As to a pending disaster, I'd pray and not stop. I would encourage others to pray as well. As far as God "relenting" the short version is it's His world and if He does relent of a pending disaster, it's up to Him to decide and not us. We pray for His will, not ours.
  - d) Something else is interesting to consider. Let's assume a large part of the army that went to march against Israel lived in that city. Does that mean God relented on "Disaster #1" as to allow "Disaster #2" to occur" (The destruction of the Northern Kingdom.) I don't know. I just know that God used the Assyrians as His instrument of judgment against Israel.
  - e) In the meantime, God relented on this disaster on this city as the city collectively repented and turned to Him. Meanwhile, Jonah's still in a bad mood as that's not what he wanted.
10. Chapter 4, Verse 1: But Jonah was greatly displeased and became angry. <sup>2</sup> He prayed to the LORD, "O LORD, is this not what I said when I was still at home? That is why I was so quick to flee to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity. <sup>3</sup> Now, O LORD, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live."
- a) Let me start by paraphrasing these verses from Jonah's perspective, "God I knew you'd do this. I knew You'd be compassionate upon that city. I knew that when You got me out of that fish I knew I had to travel to Nineveh. However, I did disobey You, so I believed you can't use me anymore because of that disobedience. Besides (I'm speculating here) I heard how Hosea and Amos preached about North Israel's destruction so I'm way ahead of you that you preserved them so they could destroy the Northern Israel Kingdom!"
  - b) Even if I'm way off base on the last part, Jonah was angry because God's will did get done in Nineveh and Jonah knew that his will "lost". That's why he was throwing that tantrum at this point in the story and wanted God to end his life here and now.
  - c) Let's think about this story from the perspective of a missionary. Suppose you did a lot of work in one location, and then someone else came along who lead the people you worked on to Jesus. Would you feel some jealousy? Many people have died as Christian martyrs without any missionary work. I've found that God works through the events of those who have given their lives for Him. Sometimes He excludes us if for no other reason than just to build our trust in Him. My point is no one should get the credit for leading people to be Christians or better believers, except God Himself. If we're making an effort for Him, then I'd say most likely we are doing His will, so we don't have to worry about credit. We don't get rewards based on how many people we've saved, but strictly on whether we are using our lives to go make a difference for Him. Ask God to lead us, and He will, His way!
  - d) Meanwhile Jonah's in a bad mood because this large city is repenting of sin as they realize who is God. So what about Jonah? In effect, that's the big question of Chapter 4. So let us read on:
11. Verse 4: But the LORD replied, "Have you any right to be angry?"
- a) As I said, I'm fascinated with the question of how God communicates with us. Since I did give that speech earlier in the lesson, I'll just accept the fact that God somehow stated that sentence to Jonah. He realized it was God speaking to him and now Jonah has to ponder how to respond to what's going on.

12. Verse 5: Jonah went out and sat down at a place east of the city. There he made himself a shelter, sat in its shade and waited to see what would happen to the city. <sup>6</sup> Then the LORD God provided a vine and made it grow up over Jonah to give shade for his head to ease his discomfort, and Jonah was very happy about the vine.
- a) Picture Jonah completing the mission God gave him to do. Jonah knows that for one to be a prophet of God, one has to see if what he says come true. My point is Jonah camped out by the city to see the results of his preaching and how it'd affect him when he got home.
  - b) I suspect Jonah's in the "They can't really mean it" mode. For example, we may have seen a person give their lives to Jesus and think, "They didn't really change, let me watch to see if there really is any change to their lives". I've been involved in a small way in a big effort to lead people to Jesus. Every summer in Southern California a group of churches rent out a baseball stadium. An evangelist will ask people to give their lives to Jesus and many do make that commitment. A lot of those people "stick and it" and some don't. My point is I see Jonah as a "doubter" who thinks, "All those people can't really be serious. If they really want to commit their lives to God that means changing their way of living. I'm just going to hang out outside this city and see if those people really do change without me walking around town with my sandwich board!" No that's not in the text, but that's how I see him acting based on the text in these verses.
  - c) OK then, why make such a big deal about Jonah building a shelter? Grant it, Iraq is a very hot place to live and it's a matter of being comfortable. The reason we get the reference to God creating a shelter in Verses 5 and 6. I suspect Jonah was trained as a prophet and had no practical skills on say, how to build a shelter. Verse 5 says Jonah built one and Verse 6 says God caused a big plant to grow up so Jonah had a shelter. The point behind that fact is that God cares for those who do Him and make the effort to do what He wants us to do. God knew Jonah needed some relief from the heat and we get another miracle of a plant that grows quickly so Jonah had some shade. Some commentaries speculate on the issue of what kind of plant it was. My view is whatever it was, God is the one who caused it to grow quickly there and then.
  - d) As I thought about these verses, I kept thinking about Jonah's sorrow. He didn't believe a true repentance of this city took place. He sat there and pouted. He knew he let God down by traveling in the other direction. He asked God to end his life now that he accomplished his mission of preaching here. To me the miracle of a big plant growing fast to give shade to Jonah was God's way of saying, "No I don't want you (Jonah) to end your life now, and to prove it, I will provide some comfort for you while you sit there and stare at this city". I suspect Jonah's waiting for "God's fist" to slam into that city or something like that!
  - e) One thing I've learned from studying the bible carefully is God never does for us what we can do for ourselves. For example, if we're handy with tools and we have the supplies in hand, I doubt God would have provided a shelter for Jonah. Because Jonah wanted some sort of shelter, God did it for Him. It's an example of how He works in the background of our lives to do what we can't do ourselves. If you think that can't be true for me, consider the fact that God made it possible for you to have food, shelter and clothing at this point. Yes, it comes through our effort, but remember who made it possible for us to have those things at this moment!
  - f) Finally, I'd like you to think about this scene as if you were a missionary. Let's say you've completed some assignment you were asked to do. To make up an example, let's say you were sponsored by a Christian organization to go spend a week or a year at some place. It is now over and you have no idea if you made a difference or not. It's easy to sulk after it's over as if to think, "Did I really make a difference?" My point is I'm convinced this chapter is here to comfort missionaries who think, either, I'm done and didn't make a difference or I didn't really like the people I just work with. My point is just as God is comforting Jonah here, so God works to comfort us to realize we are making a difference for Him!

13. Verse 7: But at dawn the next day God provided a worm, which chewed the vine so that it withered. <sup>8</sup> When the sun rose, God provided a scorching east wind, and the sun blazed on Jonah's head so that he grew faint. He wanted to die, and said, "It would be better for me to die than to live."
- a) Meanwhile, Jonah is still in a bad mood because he either thought the city residents didn't really mean it when they repented or Jonah thought he let God down. Either way, he was still sitting there sulking. Now to make matters worse, the plant that grew quickly to give Jonah some shade died as fast as it rose. The Hebrew word translated worm can refer to a number of worms and not just "one of them".
  - b) Anyway, Jonah is in a bad mood again as he didn't see God destroy this city and now this single source of comfort for Jonah died as miraculously as it rose in the first place.
  - c) Stop and think about a time when you were miserable? What made it better? We can have something to improve our situation and that too can fade away! We don't need to receive signs from God to know if we're doing the right thing! Just knowing we made the effort to make a difference for Him should be enough. As I said earlier, we don't get rewards based on the number of people we save. We'll be rewarded if by His power use our time and our resources to make a difference for Him. My point is our "miraculous plant" can come and go, but our reward for an effort to make a difference for God doesn't come that easily. We will get a great sense of joy one receives when making that difference for Him.
  - d) Jonah's in a bad mood because it wasn't the results he wanted. He wanted judgment. I am also speculating Jonah knew how cruel the Assyrians could be. He probably realized how they broke up families and made them march hundreds of miles strung in a line having a fishhook in their mouth. I'm guessing Jonah considered the Assyrians as a horrible group of people who require God's judgment and not His mercy. If you're every really angry at someone, you know how hard it is to see them as needing His love and not His judgment.
  - e) While I'm in the neighborhood, let me discuss that issue briefly. How do we deal with our anger at someone or some group? How do we let go of that anger and learn to see people as needing God's love? The short answer is to pray for them daily. That is why Jesus told us to pray for those who persecute us. (Based on Matthew 5:44.) I've discovered in those situations, it takes time. I remember when someone hurt me badly a long time ago, I had to pray for them daily for a month before I could forgive them. We need to get to a point where we see people as needing Jesus and not as people who've hurt us.
    - i) Let me throw my standard disclaimer in here, that I understand situations do exist where we need to get away from the people who've hurt us. I also know of people who are still angry at someone who is dead. Often it is good to simply write to the person who's hurt us, even if we actually send that letter or not. God desires a full loving relationship with us and our anger at someone is blocking that anger. That is why God wants us to work to let go of it as it blocks our ability to love others if we hold on to that resentment. Keep in mind that God's justice is a separate issue from our forgiveness. If someone commits a crime against us, the authorities may still have to punish them, but that's a separate issue of us letting go of any anger so that we can have that loving relationship with God. He wants us to work to let go of our anger, not so the person can get off "scot-free", but so they won't continue to mentally hurt us, by what they did!
    - ii) Speaking of not letting go of anger issues, it's time to get back to Jonah.
  - f) You can tell when someone's in a miserable mood, because the smallest thing will cause a horrid reaction. Let's face it, losing what's causing us shade should not be enough to make a statement saying we want to die! The point is when we have anger issues and we isolate ourselves, it just makes us more and more miserable. If you think about it, if the residents of this city had repented, there must be people there who'd like to shake Jonah's hand. He is isolating himself and too miserable to be happy with anyone right now.



- g) Think about how easy it is to change our mood. A great illustration is, let's say you're in a big argument with your spouse. Then someone is at the door. All of a sudden, we're in a good mood because we want to be on our best behavior for this guest. My simple point is our mood can always change at any moment. When we think, "Life is horrible and I might as well end it now", we have to remember that God's in charge of our time, not us! I'd say the worst thing one can do when one is feeling miserable is to isolate ourselves. I'd say the best thing to do, is do a good deed for someone else! No one is in a miserable mood when they are making a difference for someone else! Yes, I'm well aware often it is necessary to be alone at the least to go pray for that person who's hurt us and ask God for the strength to face them. My point is we need to rise above how others are treating us so we can have a loving relationship with the God who created us as well as others around us. The point is not letting the behavior of others affect our peace with God and what He wants us to do with our lives as a witness for Him.
- h) OK then, now that I've beaten that point to death, we can get back to Jonah's bad mood!
14. Verse 9: But God said to Jonah, "Do you have a right to be angry about the vine?" "I do," he said. "I am angry enough to die." <sup>10</sup> But the LORD said, "You have been concerned about this vine, though you did not tend it or make it grow. It sprang up overnight and died overnight.
- a) Let me give a paraphrase here, "Hey Jonah, did you create all those people you have been witnessing to? Did you make it possible for things to grow out of the ground? Who gave you the ability to make a difference for Me anyway?" Yes, this is a "who's really in charge of life speech" and we all need it every now and then.
- b) Let's be honest, to get into a "poor, poor pitiful me" mood is easy to do and that's why we had a popular song a generation back with that key phrase. (A Warren Zevon song if you care.) Jonah's finishing this book with the reminder that God created all things and we do need to see the world from that perspective and not from the idea of whatever suffering is a part of our life at the moment. I've always been fascinated by the fact that suicide is low among those who are permanently disabled in some way (e.g., can't see or have to live out life in a wheelchair). My point is people who were born with or came into some disability in their lives have a much higher rate of acceptance of their lives than the general public. I state that fact here, because it's really easy to consider our circumstances and think no one has it as bad as me right now, I might as well die as no one can relate to my pain!
- c) What we have to learn is we can't fix other people. All we can do is have a good attitude about life and see it from God's perspective. We can't let how others treat us be the model of how we treat them. God does hold us to a higher standard. He expects to show others by example how it is we're to live. He needs us to rise above any "Poor, poor pitiful me" moment and care about what He cares about, which is to see people draw close to Him.
- d) Remember that's why God called Jonah to be a prophet in the first place. God wanted to use Jonah to be a witness to the world that He loves people and wants a relationship with anyone and everyone willing to draw close to Him. Jonah was too much into a pity party to realize that at this time. Yes, I'm positive it sunk in later, as that's why Jonah wrote the details of this experience after it was all over, to remind us of why all believers are called to be missionaries whether we realize it or not.
- e) I've shared before that one of my favorite signs was on the side of my old church. We saw it as we drove out of the parking lot. It read, "You are now entering your mission fields!" I'm convinced all Christians need to realize that as we leave church. One reason to gather in any type of church setting is to strengthen each other as to make that difference. Once church is over, it's "missionary time" for all of us. It may be at home, or at work, or sent off to some foreign land. Wherever we go, we are always on the clock for Jesus, whether we realize it or not. It helps to keep that in mind, the next time we have our own "pitiful me" moment in our lives. We're here to work for God, not the other way around. Jonah forgot that at this moment in time and he wrote this book to remind us of that fact.

15. Verse 11: But Nineveh has more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left, and many cattle as well. Should I not be concerned about that great city?"
- a) A small debate among bible scholars with too much time on their hands, is what was the actual population size of Nineveh when Jonah preached to it? Some say it was 120,000 as it's written in this verse. Others say that reference is to children who aren't old enough to know right from wrong, so the population was actually much larger. Now that you know both sides of this debate, I can drop the issue as something that I don't consider important nor do I have any interest in debating.
  - b) The key point of this verse is God's reminding Jonah that He cares about all people and it is His desire to draw all people close to Him. Our job as Christians is to care about what it is that God cares about: He cares about having people draw close to Him so He can have a loving relationship with people. The basic function of missionary work is to tell people of the God who rules the world, cares about each of us and He has the power to be able to have a relationship with everyone who asks. I'm well aware of the fact it's a difficult thing to realize God is that powerful. My favorite quote on that topic is, "Every time I consider how big God is, all I do is get a headache". (David Hocking). Anyway, I picture Jonah's effort to walk around this large city, white as a ghost, from the stomach acids of the whale and being indifferent about whether or not the city repents. No matter what Jonah looked like or however the method, it was in my mind, the greatest single revival in the history of mankind. It shows what God can do with anyone willing to make him or herself available to Him for His use.
  - c) Before I wrap this up, let me also talk about the "cattle" that were there. Does God care for the lives of animals? There are always going to be people who think, "I could never live in heaven unless my beloved pet "fluffy" was there with me." I believe it was Billy Graham who responded something like, "God doesn't want you to be miserable in His relationship with you and if that's what it takes to make you happy, I'm sure He'll arrange something!" Any pastor or teacher who's ever worked with children can tell you of all the prayers they have had to make for sick or dead animals.
    - i) The way I view it is God created the world and He put man in charge of all of the animals. Someone who is cruel to animals is someone who's cruel to the creatures that God put us in charge of.
    - ii) At the same time, I'm equally as convinced of an old proverb that effectively says, "The greatest purpose an animal can serve is as food for humans". All I'm saying is God allows us to eat meat and I'm not a vegetarian or "vegan" for that reason.
    - iii) All that leads me back to God "caring for the cattle" in this verse. If He created all the animals, it would make sense that He expects us to care for them as well. They would suffer if the city was destroyed. The fact that God's holding off judgment is a sign that He cares for the lives of innocent people as well as innocent animals.
16. Let me wrap up this short four-chapter saga, as we consider it from our roles as missionaries. We as Christians have the mission of spreading the Gospel into all the world. That's why we've been separated as a people in the first place. God wants us to see people as needing Him. That means we are to see the people we struggle with or are angry at, and realize that the only way they will change is if their hearts are right before God and they realize He will judge them. I've learned that trying to get people to change their ways without God's help is impossible. All we can do is be a good witness for Him and let Him take over changing people's lifestyles. We're not capable of fixing or changing people, but He is. He gets us involved in the process by asking us to pray for people's hearts to be open to His truth and live as a witness for Him. Yes, many people will reject that message, but some will accept it. It may not be us that leads them, but that should not stop us from living as He desires, as a witness for Him. That's what God had to teach Jonah and that's what He wants to remind us as we went through this four chapter book!

17. On that positive note, let's close in prayer: Father, first, we thank You that You have separated us as individuals and as an entity so we can make a difference for You. Help us to remember You're not looking for ability, but just availability. Help us to give back to You, the most valuable thing You've given us, our time, so that we can use it for Your glory. Make it obvious to each of us how You want each of us to use the time You've given us and our resources so that we can collectively make a difference for you. Help us to remember why You've created us in the first place, so that we do use our lives for Your glory. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.