

Sunday August 2, 2026
FGBC @ Playhouse
Jonah 4:1-11
Jonah: For The City Series
30 Minutes

Grace in the Face of Death

- I want you to reflect on the entirety of your life for 30 seconds.
 - o What stands out to you from your life?
 - o If you were forced to sit down and write your obituary right now, what would you include?
 - What parts of your life story would you not include?
- Working as a pastor and in a funeral home, I have had the privilege of reading numerous obituaries through the years.
 - o An obituary captures a snapshot, or maybe multiple snapshots of a person's life.
 - o It doesn't tell the whole story the way that an autobiography might, though.
- The book of Jonah isn't a true obituary, but it gives us a few snapshots of who Jonah is, just like an obituary would.
 - o Jonah is a man of God...a prophet.
 - o Jonah is a very patriotic individual.
 - o Jonah is probably very good at marathons...he runs away from God, runs away from his struggles, and runs away from people that he should probably love.
 - o Jonah was swallowed by a fish.
 - o Jonah has some struggles with faith.
- Today we are going to take a look at the last part of Jonah.

READ JONAH 4:1-11

- At this point in Jonah's story he is acting like someone who has worked and worked and worked all day, and then he gets to the end of the day, and realizes that he is so hungry that they just can't anymore.
 - o Jonah is acting like he hasn't had his Snickers and he just isn't himself...or maybe this is the true Jonah.
 - Jonah isn't just irritable and hangry though...he understanding of God has become misaligned along the way, which we have been looking at throughout the book of Jonah.
- Jonah's anger seems to be very petty.
 - o Jonah is getting upset because the outcome of this situation is exactly how it should be relative to what his job is.
 - If you are a musician, what tells you that you have "made it"?
(*Rediscovering Jonah*, Keller, 99)
 - Likely when you are selling out big stadium concerts...not CN Centre, but Madison Square Garden.

- Imagine that you are a musician who has made it...you have been playing lots of shows around the world and finally you hit it big with a stadium series of shows.
 - And your first response is to get mad because you got what your job requires...musical success.
- In the Kingdom of God, Jonah, as a prophet, should experience true success because an entire city has repented and turned to God.
 - Whether you are a prophet, a pastor, a congregant, or simply someone interested in religion, you have to acknowledge that that is a huge WIN.
 - 120,000 people would have marked one of the largest cities at that period of time...that is 120,000 people turning from darkness to light.
 - 120,000 people choosing hope over hopelessness.
 - 120,000 people choosing abundant life instead of abundant death.
 - 120,000 people committing to a life that breathes life into the world around it.
 - This is the definition of what you want to have happen if you are a missionary, a pastor, a follower of Jesus.
 - But Jonah hates it.
 - Jonah just wants to pout and wallow in his own sorrows.
- When Jonah sees lives transformed, he is faced with an issue of head vs heart.
 - Each of us intellectually know things, but sometimes it can be hard for our hearts to catch up.
 - Each of you today walked into church at the Playhouse, walked through the entry way and into the auditorium where you found a seat and sat down.
 - For each of you, your heads went, “Yup, that’s a seat” and your heart followed behind and quickly said, “Yup, that’s a seat, it’ll support me”...this was a split second decision that you made...it wasn’t something that you overthought, and you sunk your butt into the chair.
 - There are times when your head and your heart have to walk a tightrope as you figure out the best thing to do or way to act.
 - If you have ever gone sky diving, you sit in the airplane, knowing that the parachute has been carefully packed by individuals who are well trained...and you are going to be jumping out of the plane, with one of those chutes, along with a backup chute, and you are going to have someone strapped to you who has been sky diving hundreds if not thousands of times.
 - Intellectually, you know you will be fine.

- The rate of death in a tandem jump is 1 death for every 500,000 jumps...like .0002 percent
 - Your heart on the other hand may jump in and say, “Absolutely not...this airplane is a death trap...I am not jumping...I don’t trust these skydivers...maybe they are first timers like me...maybe they didn’t pack the chute currently and they are trying to trick me into jumping to my death...maybe they are going to push me out of the plane and not join me in the tandem skydive.”
 - We all are faced with these head vs heart dilemmas.
- Jonah knows that God is a God of love.
 - He knows that God is merciful and gracious.
 - He knows that God is a God who forgives.
 - Yet his heart says that isn’t good enough.
 - Jonah didn’t believe that God’s love, God’s mercy, God’s grace, God’s forgiveness was meant for other people who were not Hebrews even though he knew that reality in his head.
- Jonah gets angry at God, because God is merciful.
 - Jonah goes and pouts on the east side of the city of Ninevah.
 - Jonah’s plan here is not just to sit down for a quick breather, but he is sitting down and settling in for the long haul of pouting.
 - He chooses a place, where he can watch what happens to the city of Ninevah.
 - If you were going to settle in and watch what happens to Prince George, where would you watch from?
 - Likely not the train tracks on First where you could see a few buildings across the street.
 - You would likely plan to settle in on a place like University Hill where you can see almost everything.
 - Jonah is likely on an elevated slope where he can watch what is going to happen...and what we know of Jonah, it is likely that he is watching and waiting for a trainwreck.
 - He is likely waiting for God to come back and say, “Just kidding...I said I was going to be merciful, but I am going to destroy Nineveh anyways.”
 - Jonah had received grace from God on numerous occasions, the most notable is when God had grace on Jonah in the fish...in Jonah’s prayer in Jonah 2 he remembers that God had grace on him...yet Jonah doesn’t

want others to experience God's grace.

- Jonah builds a shelter, giving him a place to watch, to rest, to maybe eat a snack.
 - And God is merciful to Jonah again in providing a tree...a vine...providing some shade.
 - 3 possibilities here:
 - This plant was already starting to grow in the place that Jonah was settling in.
 - This plant grows really fast.
 - Jonah has decided to settle in for more than a couple hours.
 - All three are likely true here.
 - A castor oil plant is a common plant in this part of the middle eastern world and they can grow 5-8 feet tall in a growing season...a growing season is still a few months though.
 - Jonah is watching and waiting and having a hard time trusting God completely.
 - When the shade of this plant hits Jonah, he is thankful for the plant.
 - He was hot and frustrated and needed a win...this plant, although it seems like a small victory, was exactly what he needed, or exactly what he figured he needed at that time.
 - God provided for a disobedient Jonah who loved to run away and hate his enemies.
 - But then the worm showed up and the plant died...the leafy shade that the plant once provided was now just a few measly branches.
 - And Jonah gets angry again.
 - Jonah's only wish was for death.
 - Death was better for Jonah than continuing to pursue a

God who doesn't only offer
grace to him and him alone.

- In seeing God's provision of a plant to shade Jonah and that same plant dying shortly thereafter, we can't help but reflect briefly on Job.
 - o Job was a faithful man of God who had unimaginable wealth and lost it all.
 - When things in life are going well, it is easy for us to point to the goodness of God.
 - "God has been at work blessing me and providing and giving me what I need"
 - When things in life aren't going well, it becomes much more difficult to point to God with joy...it is easier to point at God in accusation.
 - "God, I am following you, yet you haven't given me what I want."
 - Job lost all of his livestock, all of his farmhands and workers, and all of his children, and he stands there in shocked grief yet falls to the ground in worship, saying, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return. The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." (Job 1:21, ESV)
 - We can't not grieve in the midst of hardship.
 - o It isn't healthy to brush off immense loss as being "no big deal"
 - o But through the loss, can we say as Job said, "blessed be the name of the Lord" even when we are in a place of uncertainty, pain, and brokenness.
 - Or are we more inclined to respond like Jonah, "God kill me now...I can't live like this...I can't live in this heat without the shade that I had."
 - o Job suffers yet worships while Jonah receives mercy yet resents deeply.
- It is almost like Jonah has forgotten his first love...he has forgotten about that time when he first encountered the God of Israel.
 - o You don't just become a prophet accidentally.
 - Jonah didn't just apply for a job at the corner store and ended up being offered a job as a prophet instead.
 - Jonah knew God and he loved God and he pursued God with all that he was, but at some point, he forgot about that initial encounter with God.
 - He came to live life by his rules instead of God's rules.
 - o Jonah lost focus of what was right in his eyes and in God's eyes.
 - Jonah's focus was very nearsighted.
 - He was focused on the tree that grew up and then died.
 - He was focused on his comfort.
 - He was focused on his people, the Israelites...his nation.

- Jonah missed the bigger picture of God drawing an entire world of hurting and broken people to himself...even before Jesus comes onto the scene in the New Testament, God is drawing all people to himself...offering hope to a hopeless world.
 - God loves everyone...that is not something that Jonah wanted to hear.
 - Jonah wanted God to love the people that Jonah loved and no one else.
 - Jonah is utterly disappointed when he experiences the extent of God's love.
 - God loves you.
 - God loves your best friend.
 - God loves your worst enemy.
 - God loves Jonah.
- God voluntarily attaches himself to sinful, broken humans, like Jonah, like you and me, and weeps over them.
 - We, Jonah, humans, attach ourselves to random crap and weep when we lose it...
 - We attach ourselves to a tree that provides shade, political alliances, comforts, wealth, jobs, relationships, family dynamics, friendships...when those things fall apart or disappear, we weep because we have lost what we wanted.
 - God weeps over broken people who have strayed, and that is all of us.
- As this story of Jonah draws to a close, there is a lot of tension that remains and there is no resolution to that tension.
 - Jonah – “Kill me”
 - God – “Shouldn’t I feel sorry for people living in spiritual darkness?”
 - That’s it.
 - There is no response from Jonah.
 - Nothing else that God says to Jonah.
 - Just this tension between life and death...between spiritual darkness and abundant life.
- As we are left wondering why there isn’t a nicely wrapped up conclusion, we begin to see where we fit into this story.
 - Jonah was called to follow God and he did, sort of.
 - We are called to follow God and we do, sort of.
 - There are always those periods of time we pursue Jesus with all of our heart and all of our soul and all of our strength.
 - And there are other periods of time where we pursue Jesus with a fraction of our lives, holding on to what we want.
 - Jonah was faced with idolatry...the idolatry of his nation and his comfort was forefront in his life.
 - We too get faced with idolatry...not idolatry of a statue or a golden calf as we read through the Old Testament but idolatry of anything that takes

- precedence over God...work, money, happiness, sex, education, friendships, hobbies, family.
- Jonah got angry when he should have been excited that God showed up in his life.
 - We can often get angry when someone else succeeds while we are struggling.
 - The story of Jonah and the story of you and me is almost identical in how we respond to broken situations.
- The story of Jonah ends on God's note, not Jonah's note.
 - God is too holy and too loving to destroy Jonah or to allow him to remain as he is and that is the same for us (*Rediscovering Jonah*, Keller, 132).
 - God is too holy and too loving to leave you where you are...God wants to take you into the fullness of abundant life.
 - This does not mean that God wants to take you into an easy, peaceful life with no issues, but in the midst of the chaos, God is leading you into his purposes, not your own.
- There are glimpses of Jonah's life where we likely could say, "Live your life like Jonah."
 - We don't really see any of those moments in the book of Jonah, but we can deduce from the fact that Jonah was a prophet, that at one point in time, he likely followed God well.
 - Most of the book of Jonah acts as more of a cautionary tale to us...don't do what Jonah did.
- Each of us has glimpses in our own lives of successes...joys...victories, where others see our lives and say, "I want to follow Jesus like _____"
 - And then there are glimpses of disaster... "I don't want to live my life like _____...they are not a great example of following Jesus."
- Life as a follower of Jesus is about growing to look more like Jesus, day after day, step after step, moment after moment.
 - And there are going to be times in those days after days where you are absolutely going to want to have those joys and successes as a part of your obituary one day.
 - There are going to be lots of experiences where you are going to say, "I hope nobody saw that and I hope that doesn't make it into my obituary."
 - As you move from where you are to where God is taking you, are you ready?
 - Are you ready for God to lead you into abundant life, but life that is not easy?
 - Are you ready for God to chip away at the rockiness and brokenness of your heart to shape you into the image of Christ?
 - Are you ready to mourn for those living in spiritual darkness?
 - Are you ready to wait and allow God to direct you?
 - Are you ready to come back over and over again to a God of love and hope and peace.
 - Are you ready to celebrate God showing up in life even if it is in someone else's success?

- Are you willing to wait in the tension of the end of the book of Jonah realizing that it is there that God is inviting you into whatever lies ahead.
- God's grace doesn't just save us, but it reshapes us now into the image of Christ...it reshapes what we love and how we live from this day on.

“Throughout the story Jonah tries to escape God, but God utilizes his creation to bring him back. God provides a great fish, a vine, a worm, and a scorching east wind to show Jonah that there is no way he can escape God. He is the God of Israel, the God of Ninevah, the God of the entire creation...of you and I.” (*An Introduction to the Old Testament*, Longman & Dillard, 448)