

Feeling For The City What God Feels For The City

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 10 June 2012

Preacher: Darrell Johnson

[0 : 00] May the words of my mouth and the meditation of each of our hearts be pleasing and acceptable to you, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

We are a community following Jesus with a heart for the city and beyond. That is how we say who we as a church are in this part of the world.

It is our identity and mission statement. It's printed on our order of worship. It's on the first news. It's on the letterhead of the church. We are a community following Jesus with a heart for the city and beyond.

All the particulars of any other mission statements evolved from this basic conviction. We are a community, not just individuals, not just an amalgamation of individuals, but an interconnected community birthed by the spirit of God centered in a person in Jesus of Nazareth, crucified, resurrected, ascended to the throne.

We are a community following Jesus, a community reading about Jesus, thinking about Jesus, worshiping Jesus and with him, his father and his spirit praying in Jesus name, watching and waiting for his glorious return.

[1 : 30] We are a community following Jesus. Whom else would we want to follow? As the disciple Peter said to Jesus, after a number of people have been falling away from following Jesus, to whom else shall we go?

You have the words of eternal life. The implication being only you have the words of eternal life, because only you are the man who is God and only you are the God who is man.

With a heart for the city. We are following Jesus with a heart for the city and beyond. Heart.

The word implies not only vision, but feeling. The word implies not only conviction, but emotion. We are community following Jesus with a heart for the city and beyond.

I have been suggesting to our leadership since I was called here three years ago that we need to make a small change in the wording of our identity and mission statement.

[2 : 41] It's a small change, but it has a huge implication. I suggest we need to replace the word a with the pronoun his.

That we change it from a heart for the city to his heart for the city. We are a community following Jesus with his heart for the city, with the God man's heart for the city, with the triune God's heart for the city.

Much less fickle than my heart for the city. Much more persevering than my heart for the city. Much more merciful and compassionate than my heart for the city.

Which leads us to the text Andrea read for us a few moments ago. Nowhere else in the Bible is God's heart for the city.

More clearly revealed than in the Old Testament book of Jonah. As we will see in our four part series of studies in this book, there are many practical themes and lessons that we can use in as first century disciples in our time.

[3 : 56] But in and through all those themes and lessons, we will constantly meet the living God's feeling for the city. I use the word feeling very intentionally.

Not just God's vision for the city. Not just God's thoughts for the vision. But God's feeling for the city. The book of Jonah is all about God's feelings.

God's feelings for what God himself calls the great city. More to the point, the book of Jonah is about the living God seeking to bring his people into his heart, into his feelings for the city.

Or better yet, the book of Jonah is all about getting his people to feel for the city what he feels for the city. Which is what Jonah the disciple, Jonah the prophet, does not want to feel.

Jonah does not want to feel for the city what God feels for the city. Especially for the 7th century before Christ city of Nineveh on the banks of the Tigris River in now 21st century Iraq.

[5 : 10] To Jonah, even though Nineveh is full of all this great culture and all this great technology for Jonah, Nineveh is a very, very bad city.

It's an evil city. It's the leading city of the Assyrian Empire. Which in the 8th century before Christ had inflicted great horror on Jonah's people, on the Jews of the northern tribes of Israel.

And Jonah does not want to feel all that the God of the Jews feels for the Gentile city of Nineveh. Let me put it this way.

Jonah the disciple, Jonah the prophet, is called to go where he does not want to go. To do what he does not want to do. To say what he does not want to say.

Why does he not want to go and do and say? Because it involves facing a part of God, a dimension of the character of God, he does not want to face.

[6 : 10] To go where he does not want to go. To do what he does not want to do. To say what he does not want to say. Means having to come to terms with something about God he wishes were not true.

In running from God's call. Or as I should say, in trying to run from God's call. Jonah is not just running from the call. Jonah is running from a God he wishes did not exist.

Imagine. Imagine. A prophet of the living God. Who up to this point has faithfully served God.

Who was used by God in a number of crucial turning points in the history of Israel. Imagine this prophet of the living God wanting to run away from God. It is a bit difficult to date this story of Jonah with modern historical precision.

We know that the Assyrian Empire. Of which Nineveh was the leading city. Destroyed Samaria. Northern Israel. In 722 BC.

[7 : 19] Now whether the story of Jonah takes place before that horror. Or after that horror. We do not know. I think it was before that time. Before 722 BC.

Assyria had already destroyed just about every other kingdom in the way. And the prophets of Israel could hear the trampling of the boots of the soldiers. They could see the writing on the wall.

The Assyrian army was known for being ruthless. It was driven by maniac arrogance and gratuitous violence. Think the Assad forces of Syria today. Then came the call.

Jonah 1.1. The word of the Lord. The word of Yahweh. Came to Jonah. Rise and go to Nineveh. The great city. To Nineveh.

Just the mention of that name Nineveh. Evoked the images of the brutality of that empire. Jonah wants Nineveh destroyed. Nineveh destroyed. Nineveh is the source of destruction in the world.

[8 : 22] And Jonah wants Nineveh destroyed. Then comes the call. The word of the Lord. The word of Yahweh. Came to Jonah. Arise.

Go to Nineveh. The great city. Cry against it. For its wickedness has come up to me. Jonah. Go and preach to the great city. You are a prophet of the living God.

Now go and do what prophets are supposed to do. Go preach to the city. And what is Jonah to preach? One sentence.

Jonah chapter 3 verse 4. Yet 40 days. And Nineveh will be overthrown. It's a word of warning. Indeed it's a word of pending judgment.

Now. Why would Jonah not want to go and preach such a word? Well. For one thing. It would be very risky. Imagine me. Or you.

[9 : 19] Being told. To go to our city. With such a word. I mean. We would be laughed at. We would be jeered at. People would throw rocks at us. But why would Jonah. Who wants to see the city destroyed.

Not go and preach a word of warning. Why? Because the word of warning. Is a word of grace. It is.

A word of warning. Is a word of grace. Yes. That God would warn. Anyone. Is pure grace. The word of pending judgment.

Is a word of grace. You see. God could have destroyed that city. As Jonah wanted God to do. Why give a warning. Why warn the city of pending judgment.

Because. And this I think is the key to understanding the story of Jonah. Because. The fact that God even bothers to speak. Means there's a possibility.

[10 : 22] People will listen. And if people will listen. There is a possibility of repentance. And if people will repent. There is a possibility. Of people experiencing grace and mercy.

As long as God warns. There is the possibility of redemption. And that. Jonah. Does not want to see happen. He does not want his.

And his people's enemy. To have the opportunity. To hear a word from God. That might cause them to repent. Of their destructive ways. And then discover the grace.

And mercy of God. Jonah knows. That when the living God. The creator and redeemer. Of all things. Speaks. Something happens.

Something always happens. Whenever God speaks. Something always happens. And Jonah. Does not want. What could possibly. Happen. To happen. When you see someone.

[11 : 24] Walking near. Or toward a cliff. You warn them. Do you not? Do you not? If you have any feeling.

For them. If you care about their well-being. At all. You warn them. Right? And is not that warning. An act. Of grace.

You do not want them. To fall off the cliff. If you did not. Care about their well-being. You wouldn't bother. Speaking up. Yet.

Forty days. And Nineveh. Will be overthrown. It's a word of grace. Because God. Does not want the city. To fall off the cliff. God. Does not want the city.

To collapse. All over the world. Today. Cities are collapsing. Even as magnificent high rises. Rise higher and higher. Cities are collapsing.

[12 : 19] From the inside. God does not want to see. Cities collapse. God will say. To Jonah. At the end of the story. In chapter four. Should I not.

Have compassion. On Nineveh. The great city. In which there are more than. 120,000 people. Who do not know. The difference. Between their right. And left hand. God is saying.

That the city does not know. The way of living. That leads to life. The city does not know. Right from wrong. And as a result. This city. Is heading for the cliff.

Go Jonah. Speak to the city. Go Jonah. And warn the city. That it's about to fall off the cliff. The word of warning. Is a word of grace. And truth. But Jonah does not want.

Grace and truth. For Nineveh. He does not want. That grace and truth. For his enemies. And so he runs. He goes in the opposite direction. He disobeys the call.

[13 : 13] To go where he does not want to go. To do what he does not want to do. To say what he does not want to say. Because he cannot handle. God's feelings. For this city. Go.

Rise. Go to Nineveh. The great city. And cry out to it. Because it's wickedness. Has come up to me. Yes. Wickedness. Is one of the meanings. Of the Hebrew word.

That is used in this text. But. As Old Testament scholar. Douglas Stewart. Is pointing out to us. There is another. And actually. More primary meaning. Of this word.

And it's the word. Trouble. It's troubles. Have come up to me. Misery. Distress. Difficulty. Harm. God is concerned.

About the trouble. The city is in. Jonah. Is not being sent. To the city. To warn it. That God is angry. And about to destroy it.

[14 : 12] Jonah is being sent. To the city. Because God could see. That the choices. The city was making. Especially. Choices. About how. God fits. Into the working. Of a city. Were causing.

The city. Trouble. The city. Was experiencing. Trouble. Because it was heading. In the wrong direction. They did not know. Right from wrong. God does not want. The city. To be in trouble.

God wants. The city. To thrive. Go Jonah. We know. That in the second half. Of the. Eighth century. Before Christ.

Nineveh. Had a number. Of military losses. It also suffered. A number. Of diplomatic. Setbacks. On the international scene. It was. Experiencing. A rising.

Famine. There were. Domestic. Uprisings. There had been. An eclipse. Of the sun. Which some people. Took. As an omen. Of doom. There was. A severe. Earthquake. And the monarchy. Was shaky.

[15 : 05] Because members. Of the monarchy. Family. Were acting. In ungodly. Ways. Behind closed doors. Yet. Forty days. And Nineveh. Will be overthrown. The message.

Is not. The message. Is not. In forty days. I will destroy you. The message. Is. The clock. Is ticking. The inherent. Consequences.

Of your choices. Are catching. Up with you. You are going to experience. The full impact. Of the inherent. Misery. Of your choices. God does not need.

To destroy. Cities. Which ignore him. And his ways. Cities. Which ignore him. And his ways. Eventually. Implode. In on themselves.

If cities. Choose the way. Of corruption. And injustice. And immorality. And violence. Then corruption. And immorality. And injustice.

[15 : 59] And violence. Begin to eat away. At the city soul. God does not want. The city. To be destroyed. The cities. Will self-destruct. Yet. Forty days. And the city. Is going to.

Implode. It's a word. Of warning. And thus. It's shot through. With grace. And mercy. Jonah. Get up. Go to Nineveh. The great city. And speak out. Because.

Its troubles. Have come up to me. The implication being. I don't want. The city. To have troubles. Am I making sense?

But Jonah. Jonah. Jonah. Could not handle. God's feelings. For the city. So the prophet. Heads off.

In the other direction. He is presumably. In Jerusalem. When he receives. This word. Nineveh. Is east. Of Jerusalem. He goes to Joppa.

[16 : 53] Which is west. Of Jerusalem. And he goes down. To get a ship. That's heading. To Tarshish. Which is in Spain. There were a class. Of ships. Called the Tarshish. Ships. Not only because.

They would go. To that city. But because. It was thought. They sailed. To the extremes. Of the trading. World. Last Tuesday. When Andrea. And I were planning. The worship service.

She reminded me. Of how the Jesus storybook. Tells this part. Of the story. Jesus goes. To the ticket. Jonah goes. To the ticket. Booth. And says. One ticket. To not Nineveh.

Please. Anywhere. But Nineveh. Now. What was Jonah thinking. Now. What was Jonah thinking. Did he think.

He could run from God. We do know. That in the ancient Near East. Many people. Worshipped. What we could call. Localized gods.

[17 : 47] It was thought. That the presence. And power. Of a God. Was localized. To the specific. Geographical territory. In which that God. Was named. And worshipped.

Worshipped. So was Jonah. Thinking. In these terms. That he could. Flee. The presence. Of Yahweh. In Jerusalem. By going. To a place. Where Yahweh. Was not yet. Named. And worshipped.

I don't think so. For one thing. Yahweh. Has expressed. Concern. For this. City. Where he is not. Yet. Known. And worshipped. And for another.

Jonah himself. Will say. In verse nine. Of the text. He calls. Yahweh. The God of heaven. The maker. Of the sea. And the dry. Land. Jonah. Jonah.

The prophet. Does not have. A localized. View of God. None of the prophets. Of Israel. Have a localized. God. They have a cosmic. God. Then what was. Jonah. Thinking.

[18 : 42] The word. Of the Lord. The word. Of Yahweh. Came to him. In Jerusalem. Jerusalem. Was the place. Where he had received. Other words. From the Lord. In his life. Jerusalem.

Therefore. Was the unique. Place. For Jonah. The place. Where you have. Encounter. With God. And experience. Intimacy. With God. Now. Many of us. Experience that.

We have special. Places. We like to go. In times of trouble. Where we know. We're going to meet God. And we're going to experience. Intimacy. God. So. Jerusalem. Was that place. For Jonah. Jonah.

Is thinking. I think. That he. If he just. Got away. From that. Sacred space. He could get away. From the encounter. And the intimacy. And he wouldn't have to deal.

With the word of God. In any way. And God would choose. A different prophet. To go to Nineveh. So he runs away. Or as I should say. He tries. To run away.

[19 : 38] He finds a ship. That will take him. Away. Away from the place. Of encounter. Away from intimacy. With God. And as Billy Graham. Once said. Commenting on this part.

Of the Jonah story. If you start running. From the Lord. The devil. Will always have a boat. For you. And you will always. Have the money. To pay for the fare.

The word of the Lord. Came to Jonah. Arise. Go. To the great city. And Jonah. Arose. To flee. From the presence. Of Yahweh.

But it does not work. Because it cannot work. I mean. Where is Jonah. Going to go. Where are you. And I. Going to go. Where we do not.

Encounter. The living God. And where we cannot. Experience. Intimacy. With God. So God. Goes. After Jonah. God is. As Francis Thompson. Once called him.

[20 : 36] The hound of heaven. When we run. From God. God runs. Right. After us. Until he has us. Hook. Line. And sinker. Now watch.

How God. Goes after. Jonah. God begins. With natural phenomena. Yahweh. Hurlled a great wind. On the sea. And there was a great storm.

We are going to see God. Act like this. In the rest of the book of Jonah. And the Lord. And the Lord appointed. A great fish. To swallow Jonah. The Lord commanded. The fish to vomit. Jonah up. And the Lord planted. A plant.

And it grew over Jonah. But God appointed. A worm. And God pointed. A scorching east wind. God goes. After Jonah. In natural phenomena. Or as we say.

In British Columbia. He goes after Jonah. In supernatural. Natural phenomena. The Lord. Hurlled. A great wind. And there was a great storm.

[21 : 30] God loves. Jonah. That much. This is not to say. That every storm. At sea. Is the work of God.

Even though. Insurance companies. Will label. Such occurrences. Act of God. It is to say though. That some of the storms. We experience. At sea. Some of the storms.

We experience. On land. Are the work of God. Most of the time. God runs after us. In this gentle breeze. But sometimes. God will come. After us. In a raging wind.

Bless his name. The storm. Was so intense. That the ship. Was on the verge. Of falling into pieces. So the sailors. Start jettisoning. The cargo. So that the ship.

Can move. Swifter. And so it can. Outrun the storm. But to no avail. And where is Jonah. During all the storm. He's in the hold. Of the ship. Fast.

[22 : 23] Asleep. That. Is how determined. He is. To run. From encounter. And intimacy. He keeps running. By running. Into unconsciousness.

He's going to find. A way. To just be unconscious. He sleeps himself. Into unconsciousness. So that he doesn't. Even have to think. About the possibility. That this storm.

Might be an act of God. But God. Keeps. After him. This is good news. God. Will not. Let us. Sleep ourselves. Away from. Knowing him. God.

Will not. Let us. Sleep ourselves. Away from. Following him. On board. The ship. Are people. Of various. Religious. And philosophical. Backgrounds. And most of them. Would share.

The conviction. That nature. Was at the mercy. Of the gods. And in their mind. This storm. Was due to a god. That was angry. And the only way. To ward off.

[23 : 17] The storm. Is to determine. Which god. Was angry. And why. So the captain. Of the ship. Has everyone. Wake up. And search.

To see. Whether they have offended. Their gods. He orders. All of the people. To pray. To their gods. The captain. Makes everyone. Pray. Including. This. Stowaway.

Down in the hall. Of the ship. Why are you sleeping? The captain. Says to Jonah. Get up. And call on your god. God. Might not. The world.

Be saying. The same thing. To the church. In our time. You seem. To be sleeping. Through the storm. Do you not. See. What is happening. In the world.

Today. Why are you. Sleeping. Get up. And call. On your god. Do you see. What god. Is doing. In this story. God.

[24 : 10] Is using. The religious superstitions. Of a gentile. Sailor. To make. The jewish. Prophet. Face reality. God.

Does more. God. Uses. Another. Common. Conviction. Of the ancient. Near east. God. Works. With the concept. Of the lot. When people. Of that time. Need to make. A major.

Decisions. On really. Crucial matters. They would. Cast the lot. So the gentiles. Sailors. Want. Out of this storm. They need to know. Who offended. Their god. They cast the lot.

And the lot. Falls. On Jonah. Was that a coincidence? Or was that the hound of heaven? Using whatever means. That are at his disposal.

To get Jonah. Back into reality. Jonah. Thought he could flee. Storm comes. He thought he could ignore. The storm. By sleeping. In the hole. Of the ship. The captain.

[25 : 02] Superstitious. Captain. Wakes him up. He thought. He could keep quiet. The lot. Falls on him. And he's exposed. God. Does more. Even though.

He's exposed. Jonah. Will still. Try to ignore. Reality. So the sailors. Rightfully. Ask him. A series of questions. Who are you? What is your occupation? Where do you come from? What is your nationality?

And then Jonah says. Listen. Jonah makes this great statement. I am a Hebrew. And I fear Yahweh. The creator. Of the sea.

And the dry land. He does. Jonah fears Yahweh. Jonah fears the God of heaven.

Jonah fears the maker of the sea. Jonah fears the maker of the dry land. No. Jonah does not. He does not fear Yahweh. And the sailors. The pagan sailors. And sailors. Hear the contradiction.

[25 : 58] Between Jonah's affirmation of faith. And his actions. What have you done? They've asked. How could you do this? It's really not a question. It's an exclamation. They could not believe.

That a person who says. They believe in such a God. Would even think. That he could escape from such a God. Do you see what God has done here? He has used the heathen.

Unbeliever. To confront Joseph the prophet. With the absurdity of his actions. Has that ever happened to you? It's happened to me many times.

I remember the first time it happened to me. It was while we were in seminary. I was the manager of the apartment building. Where Sharon and I were living. All the tenants knew we were Christians. All the tenants knew I was studying theology.

Theology. One day I was helping the woman who lived in unit number six. I was trying to fix something there. I can't remember what it is right now. But I was grumbling about all these papers.

[26 : 57] I had to write that term. And after some time she said to me. Why are you so anxious? Those of you who know me. Well no I can get real anxious about.

All the work I have to do. Why are you so anxious? She says. Is not the God you're studying at seminary. The God you keep telling me about. Big enough to help you with the papers.

Oh man. I felt like crawling in a hole. As I have on other times I've been confronted. God had used that self-avowed atheist. To confront this self-avowed believer.

With the inconsistency between what I said I believed. And how I lived. Is God not doing that for the church in North America in our time?

He's using the younger generations. To confront the established church. With our inconsistencies.

[27 : 57] As never before. Never before that I've witnessed. Our culture. Is raising very troubling questions. How could you do this?

They say. How can you behave like this? In the face of such poverty. And injustice. In the world. And say that you follow Jesus of Nazareth.

Read the disturbing book by David Kinneman. Un-Christian. Where he lists all the charges. That our culture are making against the church in our time. I'm a Hebrew.

I fear Yahweh. God of heaven. Maker of the sea and the dry land. Do you Jonah? Then why are you on a boat? Headed in the opposite direction.

From which this God called you. But Jonah keeps going. And God keeps going after him. God respects Jonah's freedom.

[28 : 59] That's really important. God respects Jonah's freedom to choose. God wants Jonah to obey. God wants Jonah to discover the joy of being obedient to the call.

But he does not want to force Jonah to obey. So. God puts Jonah on the horns of a dilemma. It was the French sociologist Jacques Ellou.

Who helped me see this. It's God's master stratagem. To get Jonah to feel. For the city. What God feels. Now watch this. Jonah and the soldiers.

Know the reason for the storm. Jonah's disobedience. Jonah and the sailors. Not the sailors. Know the resolution to the crisis. Throw Jonah overboard.

Now as a matter of fact. There is another option. And that is. Jonah can simply say. Okay. I'll go to Nineveh. But he can't.

[29 : 56] In fact. In chapter four. He says he'd rather die than do that. So. Jonah and the soldiers. Know the reason for the storm. The prophet has disobeyed.

And they know the resolution for the storm. Throw the prophet overboard. Now watch this. If Jonah tries to save face. And keep quiet about his sin.

The storm is going to continue. And the sailors are going to go into further trouble with Jonah. On the other hand. If Jonah comes clean.

And confesses his sin. The sailors will throw him overboard. The storm will subside. And the sailors will be saved from their trouble. What makes this dilemma worse for Jonah.

Is that the sailors row harder. To get out of the storm. They do not want Jonah. To suffer the consequences for his sin. Imagine that. Pagan heathens.

[30 : 54] Do not want. The Jewish prophet. To die. So what does Jonah do? He confesses his sin. I know that it's on account of me.

That the storm has come. He accepts the consequences of his sin. He goes overboard. The sailors lives are spared. And then they worship the God of Jonah.

Do you see what happened in that moment? Who are the sailors? Are they Jews? No. Those sailors aren't Jews.

Those sailors are Gentiles. In Jonah's mind. Gentiles. Gentiles. Gentiles. Are not deserving. Of the chance. To repent. And find. Mercy.

And grace. But look what happened. The very thing. Jonah does not want God. To do for Gentiles. Jonah chooses to do for Gentiles.

[31 : 55] Jonah chooses to do for those sailors. And the very thing. Jonah does not want God to do for the great city of Nineveh. Jonah chooses to do for those sailors. Jonah sacrifices himself for those he thought were not worthy of the love of God.

Jonah disobeys the call to go where he did not want to go. To do what he did not want to do. To say what he did not want to say. Because the going and the doing and the saying involved a dimension of the character of God.

He did not want to face. In the storm. On the horns of that dilemma. Jonah actually acts out the dimension of the character of God. He does not want to face.

It's brilliant. It's at that point in the story that God sends the big fish. We'll look at it next week. To come and swallow Jonah.

Does he send the fish to punish Jonah? No. Jonah's already punished. He's going down in the water. He sends the fish to rescue Jonah. And get Jonah back on the way to Nineveh.

[33 : 02] In the storm. Jonah experiences the dimension of God's character. He wants to see exercised against Nineveh. He experiences God's judgment.

But now it's against himself. He suffers the full consequences of his sin. And in the storm. He experiences the dimension of God's character. He does not want for Nineveh.

He experiences mercy for himself. Jonah should have drowned. And God could have got another prophet. But God loves Jonah. God had called Jonah. And nothing was going to thwart that call.

Including Jonah's disobedience. That's how much God loves the cities of our world. Let us pray.

Are you running from God in any way?

[34 : 11] Name the fact. It is safe. Are you running from God? Are you running from God? Are you running from God? Name it. Is there something about God you do not like?

Name it. It is safe. Is there something about God you do not like? Say it. To him. Say it. What about our city do you dislike and want to see judged?

Name it. Name it. Name it. Name it. Name it. Name it.

Who in this city do you want to find Jesus and his life? Name it.

Name it. Name it. and then once again or for the first time say to the man who is God to the God who is man here I am I'm yours help me feel for the city what you feel