

Plants or People?

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: 25 May 2025

Preacher: Dr. Wes Feltner

[0 : 00] What Did you see him?

Thank you.

Thank you.

So, we've just been eight weeks in the book of Jonah, working through that. It was our series that kind of led up to Easter, and then we've kind of finished out these last few weeks this book.

We're starting a new series in two weeks. We've been kind of advertising this for some time now. The Armor of God is going to be our study this summer. I've been getting a lot of good feedback from people already, like really excited.

[1 : 54] I've never actually taught on each individual piece of armor before, so I'm excited to dive into this series. And that'll be our focus this summer as we work through each aspect of the Armor of God.

And so, but tonight, we're going to finish up the book here in Jonah, picking up in verse 4, where we left off last week. I'm going to invite you, if you're nice and comfortable, to get over it.

And please stand if you're able to do so. And I say that in Christian love. Honor the reading of God's Word. Jonah chapter 4, and begin reading in verse 4.

It says, So Jonah was exceedingly glad because of the plant.

But when dawn came up the next day, God appointed a worm that attacked the plant so that it withered. And when the sun rose, God appointed a scorching east wind.

[3 : 12] The sun beat down on the head of Jonah so that he was faint. And he asked that he might die and said, It is better for me to die than to live. But God said to Jonah, Do you do well to be angry for the plant?

And he said, Yes, I do well to be angry, angry enough to die. And the Lord said, You pity the plant, for which you did not labor, nor did you make it grow, which came into being in a night and perished in a night.

And should not I pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also much cattle.

Let's pray. Father, thank you for this time to be together to study your word. This is really, really important. And I pray tonight that each and every one of us would listen in to what you would have to say to us as we look once more at Jonah's life and what we can learn from him and ultimately learn, Lord, from you.

And I pray that you'd come talk to us now by your Spirit. And I pray this in Jesus' powerful name.

And God's people said, Amen. Amen. You can be seated. Oh my God, no.

[4 : 30] Those were the last recorded words of Ivan McGuire. Ivan was a professional skydiver, and he loved it.

He loved that kind of pounding you get in the chest, that rush of adrenaline that runs through your body, the free-fall feeling you get when you first jump out of the plane.

In fact, Ivan loved it so much, he did it over 800 times. And all God's people said, No chance. Ain't no way.

I ain't doing it once, much less 800 times. But in addition to just the enjoyment of skydiving on his own, Ivan loved to capture the thrill of this moment for other people.

It's why he frequently volunteered for the Franklin County Sports Parachute Company in North Carolina. One day, Ivan was scheduled to film a student along with their instructor as they were going to carry out a tandem skydive.

[5 : 37] They were scheduled that day for a series of jumps, and the first two went very smoothly. It was the third jump where the unthinkable happened.

Ivan and his team made all the final preparations inside the plane as they had done hundreds of times before. Ivan attached all the camera and video equipment to his helmet, and then he jumped first.

And behind him followed the other divers. By all accounts, the tandem skydive was going well. It was a huge success. And then about halfway through, Ivan reached to pull his ripcord, and that's when he uttered those words.

Because he realized in that moment, he forgot to put on his parachute. Can you even imagine that feeling in that moment?

He had mistaken his camera bag for his parachute. And as a result, Ivan plummeted over 10,000 feet at 150 miles per hour to his death.

[6 : 51] There was an investigation into the incident to see if there was anything else involved, but all suspicious or inappropriate activity was ruled out. And the investigation said this, We are 99% certain that Mr. McGuire simply forgot to wear his parachute.

Now listen, I mean no disrespect at all with what I'm going to say, and I am no expert in skydiving whatsoever, but I'm pretty sure that the one thing you cannot afford to forget if you're going to jump out of a plane is a parachute.

And all God's people said, can we agree on that? Like that the parachute's the most important thing? Like that's the one thing you can't forget. And yet all of us have done that.

I don't mean that necessarily to the severity of Ivan. I mean this. All of us have gotten caught up in other things and as a result forgotten the most important thing.

Are you with me? We've gotten so caught up in other things, we forget the most important thing.

You've done that. You've gotten to your car only to realize you forgot your keys.

[8 : 08] Well, it's kind of hard to go anywhere without them, right? Or you get to the end of the meal and you realize you forgot your money. You get to the airport and you realize you forgot your passport and you can't travel without identification.

You showed up at the presentation and you forgot your computer. You left the house and what was that that you forgot? Oh yeah, my children. All of us, in one way or another, have forgotten the most important thing.

Do you realize, faith family, that we do the same thing as Christians? You and I, on a frequent basis, leave the house, enter into conversations, approach other people, speak to our children, interact with our co-workers, and even come to church.

And we forget the most important thing. And the greatest of these is love. Love is the most important thing.

Amen? It's the parachute of skydiving because without it, you are as good as spiritually dead. Paul actually writes to the church in Corinth.

[9 : 27] The church in Corinth had forgotten their parachute. They forgot the most important thing. Oh, they're fighting over leadership. Well, I'm a follower of Paul. I think Apollos is a better preacher.

And they're fighting over whether or not you could eat meat. Well, I think it's perfectly fine to eat meat. I don't know why you would want to eat meat offered to an idol. And they're arguing over spiritual gifts.

I've got the gift of prophecy. Oh yeah? Well, I can top you. I've got the gift of tongues. Oh, I've got even better than that. I've got the gift of teaching. And on and on and on it went. And the Apostle Paul writes to them, you know these famous words in 1 Corinthians 13.

Listen, if I could speak in the tongues of men and angels, but have not love, I'm a noisy gong and a clanging cymbal. I mean, if I even had prophetic powers, if I could understand all the mysteries and knowledge, I mean, if I had faith so much as I could remove mountains, but have not love, I'm nothing.

If I gave away all that I have, if I delivered up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.

[10 : 43] So now faith, hope, and love abide. These three, everybody say it with me, but the greatest of these is love.

Love is, it's kind of, imagine, like the string on a kite. That it's the string that makes the kite accomplish its purpose. You cut that string, if you forget love, that impressive kite that you have is worthless.

That's the argument that the Apostle Paul is making. I don't care how impressive your gift is. I don't care how impressive your ministry is. I don't care how many relationships you have. If you don't have love, you're nothing. You are as good as dead. And Paul, of course, is only quoting Jesus.

Jesus said in John 13, verse 34, a new commandment I give to you that you say it with me, love one another just as I have loved you.

[11:52] You also are to love one another. In fact, it's by this that all people will know that you are my disciples if you have, say it, love for one another.

Oh my. Oh my. It is easy in ministry, it is easy in life to be just like Ivan and forget the most important thing.

And that is exactly what has happened to Jonah here in Jonah chapter 4. Jonah, a prophet of God from among the chosen people of God, a professional, just like Ivan.

He's a professional minister and yet, he has forgotten his parachute. And God is going to come to Jonah in a series of three questions and teach him a lesson about love.

Here's the first question that God asked him, verse 4. The Lord says to Jonah, Jonah, do you do well to be angry? Every one of these questions exposes something in the life of Jonah.

[13:07] This first question exposes Jonah's wrong agenda. And the question is, we kind of left off here last week, God is asking Jonah, Jonah, what's your anger based on?

Let's talk through, let's work through the foundation of your anger. Because if you asked Jonah why he's so exceedingly angry, what would he tell you?

Well, if you were here last week or you listened to the message, you would know. Jonah would say, oh, it's because God is unfair. Oh man, God is unfair to Nineveh and he's unfair to me and he's unfair to himself.

Jonah thinks he's angry because of unfairness. But God's going to take him a little bit deeper. Look at what happens in verse 5. Jonah goes out of the city and he sat the east of the city and he made a booth for himself there and he sat under it in the shade till he would see what would become of that city.

What's going down here? What's happening? Jonah, get this image in your mind. Jonah has gone outside the city. He's built this little wooden booth and he's basically got a big giant tub of popcorn and a big gallon thing of sweet tea because, you know, he would drink sweet tea, right?

[14:21] And he's basically just watching and hoping that God finally destroys Nineveh. Maybe when the final buzzer sounds, maybe when the clock finally runs out, God will do what Nineveh deserves and he will destroy them.

After all, you remember, the warning was how many days? It was 40 days. So in Jonah's mind, he's thinking there's still time for God to get his act together. There's still time for God to do what God should do.

Maybe God will relent of his relenting. And then watch what God does to Jonah while he's outside the city in the booth.

Look at what happens in verse 6. The Lord God appointed a plant and made it come up over Jonah that it might be shade over his head to save him from his discomfort.

And Jonah was what? Exceedingly glad because of the plant. So God appoints the plant and this is Jonah's response. Bring me down. Can't run.

[15:29] Bring me down. And I was too happy. Bring me down. Can't run. Bring me down. I said, because I'm happy. That's Jonah.

Jonah is happy, happy, happy. He couldn't be more happy. And one would hardly blame Jonah given the fact that in the ancient Near East temperatures would get up to 120 degrees.

So Jonah has good reason to be happy for this plant. But what's interesting is that the text says that he was exceedingly happy. And if you're paying attention as you're reading along, you're thinking, wait a minute.

That's not how you were feeling a few verses ago. Are you with me? Look back at verse 1. Back in verse 1, but it displeased Jonah, say it, exceedingly, and he was angry.

Wait a minute. This guy has gone in a short amount of time from exceedingly angry to exceedingly happy.

[16:29] Is everybody with me? Say yes. The question is why. What's the difference? What has changed Jonah's emotional state? And here's the answer.

Listen, when Jonah gets what Jonah wants, shade, he's happy. When Jonah doesn't get what Jonah wants, the destruction of Nineveh, he's angry.

In other words, this is big. Listen, listen. Come on, everybody with me? Here it is. Jonah thinks, Jonah thinks the reason for his anger is God's unfairness, but in reality, his anger is based on his own selfishness.

Jonah thinks it's unfairness, but God is revealing through this, do you do well to be angry? Let's work through this. Let's process this. And then he gets to the very core of what's really going on here, namely, Jonah's own self-righteousness.

Jonah's own selfishness. That is, the joy of Jonah's religion is his own well-being. Somebody say, preach, preacher.

[17 : 42] And this has been Jonah's issue the whole book. Jonah, I want you to go to Nineveh. No, I don't want to. Rescued from a fish, salvation is from the Lord.

Gives Jonah a plant, I couldn't be happier. Takes that plant away, I am so upset. In other words, God reveals that Jonah's real issue is he is in love with himself.

Jonah here, in the words of an old Whitney Houston song, has found the greatest love of all. The greatest love of all It's easy to achieve Learning to love yourself It is the greatest love of all And all God's people said, That may play well in our culture, but that's awful theology.

That is terrible theology. And don't take my... Love of self is not the greatest love of all. And don't take my word for it.

Take Jesus' word for it. Listen to what Jesus says in John 15 verse 12. Listen, this is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.

[19 : 16] Notice it. Greater love. Hey, Whitney Houston, you want to know the greatest love of all? Greater love has no one than this.

That's that someone lay down his life for his friends. That's the greatest love of all.

And Jonah's love of self, Jonah's selfishness here, surfaces in three ways that's very important for us to pay attention to as Christians, and very important for us to pay attention to as a church.

First of all, when you're consumed with yourself, when you have found the greatest love of all is loving me, three things at least are going to happen. First, is you get missionally private.

You get missionally private. I want you to get this image in your mind. Get this image in your mind. The image is this. You have a prophet of God outside the city of Nineveh hoping and praying it gets destroyed.

[20 : 26] Would you let that sink in? You have a prophet of God outside the city of Nineveh, and what does he want most?

People to be destroyed. That is, Jonah has isolated himself from the very people he's been called to love.

And he did the very same thing in chapter 2. You remember, instead of praying with the sailors, what did Jonah do? He went to sleep. And here's the question.

It's this. How in the world is the world going to see God's love in you if you live isolated from the world? That was a great place for an amen, but you missed that.

That's all right. Like, Jonah, how are they going to see my love if the one who's experienced my love is isolating from the very people you've been called to serve?

[21 : 21] Oh my, this is a word for the church. Because there are many Christians who have built booths to isolate themselves from the world, except they don't call them booths, they call them churches.

There are many Christians who love the comfort of a plant, they just don't call them plants, plants, they call them church programs. Essentially, it's give me the kind of church I want with the kind of things I like and sermons that remind me about how much God loves me, and then rather than the church being a launching pad to send me into the world, it becomes a booth that isolates me from the world.

And when that's the case, faith family, we become a church that has forgotten our parachute. We have forgotten the most, we have forgotten the reason we exist, that the most important thing is love.

And so what happens, faith family, is when our agenda is ultimately our self, we become missionally private. We become just like Jonah, isolating ourselves from the very people God has called us to serve.

Here's the second thing we see in Jonah's life, and not just that we become missionally private, but we become personally petty. Fortunately, this never happens in churches. Get this image in your mind.

[22 : 54] The first image was you have a prophet of God outside the city of Nineveh waiting for its destruction. Here's the second image that should really hit you if you think about it, and that is, here you have Jonah angry that an entire city has just been shown grace, and happy about a plant.

Think about that. I'm angry that people got grace. I'm happy that I got a plant. That's messed up. In other words, here's the point, faith family. Jonah cares more about plants than people. I tell you, I could preach a three-hour sermon on this right here.

Jonah loves plants more than he loves people. Jonah's the guy that will ruin a relationship over a game of basketball. Jonah's the type of church member who gets all upset when somebody parked in my parking spot, and the kingdom of God is now falling apart.

Jonah's the kind of person who stops giving because the church needs to show me more respect. Jonah's the kind of person that will chew out the waitress because your meal was ten minutes late.

[24 : 11] Here's the point, faith family, and man, this hurts. When your agenda is not a gospel agenda, plants will matter more to you than people. When your agenda is not a gospel agenda, you will love plants more than you love people.

I'll get in trouble for this, but I don't care. If yours is a political agenda, you will care more about politics than you do human beings. If it's a social agenda, you will care more about advancing your cause than winning people for Christ.

If it's a financial agenda, you will care more about profit than you do people. It goes like this. I don't care what happens to people as long as Trump wins.

I don't care what happens to people as long as I'm making money. I don't care what happens to them as long as my platform gets expanded.

But that's what Pharisees do, not what Christians do. Listen to me. Pharisees murdered Jesus because they would rather protect their religious plant than see people be free.

[25 : 29] That's a problem. You remember the lame man that got healed on the Sabbath. The Pharisees were irate because it broke the law.

How can you heal someone? In other words, they couldn't rejoice in, I don't know, the fact that someone's walking? Oh no. They had to protect the religious plant.

Listen to me. When the grace of God is only about you, you will turn minor things into major things and forget the most important thing, which is love.

You will get petty. Just like the church in Corinth. Arguing over secondary things to the neglect of the primary thing and you will be a Christian jumping out of a plane, listen to me, clinging to your sunglasses!

While forgetting your parachute. That's what a church looks like that's arguing about petty things while forsaking the ministry of the gospel.

[26 : 41] In fact, Paul will even say this again to the Corinthian church. Listen to 1 Corinthians 9, verse 19. Listen, I'm free from all. I've made myself a servant to all. Why?

Because I want to win more of them. I care. My agenda is a gospel agenda. That's why to the Jews, I became as a Jew in order to win the Jews. To those under the law, I became as one under the law.

To those outside the law, I became as one outside the law, although I'm still under the law of Christ. To the weak, I became weak. That I might win the weak. Listen, listen. I've become all things to all people.

Why? That by all means, I might save some. And do you know why I do it? I do it all for the sake of the gospel. I don't have a political agenda.

I don't have a social agenda. I don't have a financial agenda. I have a gospel agenda. And that means I put secondary things aside.

[27 : 38] And I care more about people than plants. But this is what happens when self is the agenda. And I wonder how churches and Christians would look different if we cared more about people than plants.

If we cared more about Nineveh than the comfort of our booth. Here's the third thing we see in Jonah's life. Not only did he become missionally private, he becomes personally petty, but thirdly, he spiritually has no peace.

He spiritually has no peace. What happens when Jonah loses his plan? In fact, he says this three repeated times. Just in chapter 4 alone. He already mentioned it earlier in Jonah chapter 1. Here's the first one in verse 3. Look at verse 8. The sun rose, God appointed a scorch in east wind. The sun beat down on the head of Jonah and he was faint. And he asked that he might die. He said, it's better for me to die than to live. And when God asked him, do you do well to be angry for the plant? He says, yes, I do well to be angry.

[28 : 49] Angry enough to die. I said this last week. But when the reason for living is to get what you want and you don't get what you want, you lose your reason for living.

When your reason for living is to get what you want and you don't get what you want, you'll lose your reason for living. I thought about, I'm not going to do it, although I probably should have. I thought about doing a whole message on spiritual depression just out of the book of Jonah. And the reason why is because it's so frequently brought up in the book. This guy constantly, constantly wants out. And listen, I did a whole series on Be Anxious for Nothing several years ago. And so you could go back and have more of a holistic understanding of what I would teach on that because you know that I've talked about the fact that I believe depression can happen for many, many reasons.

Okay? There's lots of reasons. I've got a family member who's dealt with depression throughout their life. And so I'm very, very sensitive and understanding to that.

[29 : 57] So when I say this, understand, I'm only talking about one aspect of spiritual depression. I'm not suggesting it's the only cause. Is everybody hearing me? So that you don't misunderstand what I'm saying.

Okay? With that prefaced, let me say it. One of the leading causes of spiritual depression is selfishness. One of the leading causes of spiritual, not the only reason, one of the leading causes of spiritual depression is selfishness.

Because when you live to get what you want and you don't get what you want, you have no reason to live. That's Jonah. Do you do well to be angry?

Jonah, let's talk about your anger. Let's work through this, buddy. Because you think it's unfairness. When in reality, it's selfishness. Here's the second question that God asked Jonah.

Don't worry, the next two won't take as long. Verse 9. He adds something here. And God said to Jonah, do you do well to be angry for the plant?

[31 : 05] Very similar to the first question, but God adds here, do you do well to be angry for the plant? The first question was more directed at Nineveh. Do you do well to be angry about Nineveh?

But now he's asking, do you do well to be angry about the plant? Now, what is God exposing here in Jonah's life through this question? Well, notice what happens in verse 7 when God has appointed this plant.

It says, but when the dawn came up the next day, God appointed a worm that attacked the plant so that it withered. So God appoints this worm and it destroys the plant.

Now, let me just stop for a second and say this because I really think I should. How awesome is it that God appoints worms? Anybody tracking with me in this? That's pretty awesome.

I just think that's pretty cool. And the sovereignty of God is everywhere in the book of Jonah as God appoints storms and God appoints a fish and God appoints a plant and God appoints worms.

[32 : 06] When I go fishing, I quote this verse. I do. I'll take my worm and I hold it up to heaven and I say, Lord, appoint this worm for your glory and my enjoyment.

And the Lord is faithful to deliver and answer his prayer. I tell you. And all God's people said, anyways, that's not the point.

That's not the point. The point here is that this worm that God appoints destroys the plant and what happens as a result of destroying the plant?

The sun beats down on Jonah's head. Now, what is God doing? Have you ever felt like God's just messing with you? That God's just like playing a game? Is that what God is doing here?

I'm going to give you the plant and I'm going to take it away just because I want to see you miserable. No, that's not what God is doing here. He's not playing a game. He's teaching a lesson.

[33 : 06] What's the lesson? Here's the lesson. Are you listening? Say yes. Here's the lesson. God was going to give Nineveh heat. Judgment.

Forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown. But instead, He gives Nineveh shade. He relents because they believe. Jonah doesn't like that.

So to teach Jonah a lesson, what does God do? God gives Jonah shade, takes it away, and gives him heat. In other words, listen, God does to Jonah in a small way what Jonah did not want God to do to Nineveh in a big way.

To teach Jonah this lesson. Here's the lesson. How can people who have known my shade not want others to experience it?

Jonah, you know how much you love shade? How much more should you be rejoicing that I gave Nineveh shade? In other words, grace wasn't given to you to stop with you.

[34 : 23] I give you grace so that you would share grace. Like, the whole reason why you've experienced my love is so that you will share my love with others.

You see this very clearly in the parable of Matthew 18. You remember that Peter comes to Jesus and he asks, how many times should I forgive? Do you remember that?

And Jesus tells a parable. He tells a parable about a master who's got a servant that owes him 10,000 talents. That's 150 years worth of an income.

It is a debt impossible to pay. And what happens? You remember the story? The man is forgiven of all of it. The master forgives him of that impossible debt. Then he goes out to a servant of his that owed him three months of salary and he refuses to forgive him.

And the shock of the parable is this. It's this. How can someone who has experienced so much shade forgiveness want to keep it to themselves? It doesn't make any sense at all, Jonah.

[35 : 38] Do you do well to be angry for the plant? Do you know how much I've given you? You don't want that grace to extend to others?

So the question do you do well to be angry for the plant is essentially this question. Do you not want others to experience shade as well? Or you might ask it this way.

How can you be selfish with God's sacrificial love? Are you tracking with the irony there? The irony is this, right?

You're keeping to yourself the very essence of something that was meant to be given away. You're keeping to yourself the very essence of something, namely God's love, that was meant to be given.

So do you do well to be angry about a plant? Third question. Verse 10 and we're done.

[36 : 39] The Lord said, you pity the plant for which you did not labor, nor did you make it grow, which came into being in a night and perished in a night. And here's the question. Should not I pity Nineveh, that great city in which there were more than 120,000 persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also much cattle?

That is maybe one of the worst endings of any book. And also much cattle. The end, right? That was just free, okay? Anyways, the question here is, should I not pity Nineveh?

You pity a plant, should I not pity people? The logic here is really from the lesser to the greater. Watch. Jonah, you pity plants, I pity people.

If you belong to me, shouldn't you pity people? Shouldn't you love plants? Shouldn't you love people more than you love plants?

You see, Jonah's got the wrong agenda, his agenda is self. He's got the wrong attitude, he wants to keep God's grace rather than share it with others, and he has the wrong affection, he cares more about plants than people when God loves people more than plants.

[37 : 55] So here's the question I ask you, and it's this, what do you value more than loving people? love? What do you care about more than showing love?

Revenge? Winning the argument? Tradition? Rules? Your time? Your money?

Your reputation? In other words, here's what you need to do tonight. You need to identify your plant. What's the plant preventing you from loving people?

And once you identify that plant, once you identify the thing that's keeping you from the greatest thing, which is love, here's the application for all of us, and it's this, get out of your booth.

Get out from under your booth and love those that God has called you to love.

[39 : 03] After all, how could we possibly stay in our booth and never leave the comfort of our plant when we are followers of the one who left heaven?

A man who was taken outside the city like Jonah, but not to build a wooden booth, but to die on a wooden cross. A man who was not so full of anger that he wanted to die, a man who was so full of love he did die for you.

A man who, unlike Jonah, who didn't want to keep all of God's love to himself, but instead he offers God's love to each and every one of you who would come and believe.

Faith family, listen, we live in a world that desperately needs to know the love of God. So who better to share it than those who've received it?

love of God. So let us not be like Ivan, let us not be like Jonah, and forget our parachute.

[40 : 32] Remember tonight the most important thing, and the greatest of these is love. And all God's people said, amen.

Let's pray. Let's pray. Father, we know that we can slip into this ditch because the church in Corinth did, fighting over secondary things.

And we've certainly seen it in our lives so many times. We've seen it in churches that we've been evolved in, just forgetting the parachute.

I mean, love is the most important thing. People matter more than plants.

And if we don't believe that to be true, we don't understand the cross. Because Jesus came and laid His life down for people.

[41 : 41] And we want to fight about a plant. We are more like Jonah than we realize.

And thank You, Lord, for Your patience with us. In the same way You were patient with Jonah. You just took him verse by verse and worked through that anger and just drew him ever so graciously and even sometimes with a little bit of heat.

A lesson in your love. And we have the greatest ultimate lesson of love, which is the cross.

Because greater love would no one have than this, than someone lay down their life for their friends, and that is what Jesus did for us.

The greatest love of all is the love of Jesus. And we come now into a time of remembrance where we set our minds upon the cross, the sacrificial love of God demonstrated through the cross of Jesus.

And I pray it would push us out of our wooden booths to the foot of a wooden cross. In Jesus' name I pray, and God's people said, Amen.

[43 : 06] Amen. Amen. Amen.