

Book of Jonah

Week 4: The Prodigal Prophet

Jonah 4

Dr. Matt Cassidy ---- May 19, 2024

Good morning, Grace. Hey, it's story time at Grace. We're studying the best short story in all the Old Testament. It is full of satire and suspense and humor and irony. It is seeping with those attributes, as it's compressed in a very efficient story. We're looking at the story of Jonah. If you want, you can turn into your Bibles to chapter 4 of Jonah. You can try to find that ... good luck. (It's hard to find.)

What's part of the satire is that the heroes turn out to be the villains, and the villains come off as the heroes in this story. Because the story is not really the words of Jonah, but it's the story of a rebellious prophet who is fuming with anger because of the most appealing attribute of God Almighty—His steadfast lovingkindness.

Review of the Jonah Story

So, chapter 4 is the climax of the story. Before we get there, I'll just give you a quick catch-up and summary of what's happened so far. God Almighty commissions Jonah to go to the great city of Nineveh because their evil has come to His attention and must be dealt with. They're violent. And so, Jonah, instead of going to Nineveh, actually runs and then boats in the complete opposite direction. And the reason he does that is, one, he hates those vile and violent Ninevites in the capital of Assyria. And two, he has a hunch that if, just maybe, those bloodthirsty animals were to repent, it would be just like God Almighty to forgive them. He doesn't want that to happen in their life.

So, God Almighty sends a great storm to attack the boat that Jonah is on. And he is thrown overboard, and God Almighty appoints and sends a great fish to swallow Jonah and take him back to his scheduled revival.

Certainly, one of the major themes in the Book of Jonah is that God Almighty is the sovereign ruler of the universe. He's in charge and He's moving the pieces around at His will. He is in control.

Chapter 3 is pretty much part two of the book, and get this ... this is a true story. Jonah gives the absolute worst sermon that has ever been uttered historically by human lips. But yet, God Almighty is overseeing this, and so from the king to the cows, all find themselves covered in sackcloth and ashes and are begging and hoping and repenting, that God might spare them and allow them to live. The entire great city of Nineveh has this revival. It is a miracle. There is nothing like this. There's been nothing like this in all history.

Forty-Day Challenge

And you're wondering, *How does this happen?* Well, it happens because God did everything. And that's the point. God is always doing everything, especially in the context of a conversion. And if you were here last week, that fact that we saw clearly in this story about God's work in the power of salvation has inspired this church, Grace, to find itself in a forty-day challenge. We've got about thirty-three days left—kind of from now until Father's Day—that we're going to rise up and be at least as bad, but maybe a little better, than the worst evangelist in history that gave birth to the best revival in history. So, we're going to do that. We're just going to figure out a way, five words, maybe--*Hey, maybe you should come to church*--and then see what God does with it. Because that's what this story is about. This is God's work in the power of salvation. It is the power to change the Jew and the Gentile.

Jonah is God's blunt instrument, and we're changing the logo of Grace. It's going to say "Grace"—we have a new bumper sticker—it's going to say "Grace: we're God's blunt instruments." I mean, we can do that, can't we?

How Jonah Responds

Back to the story. So, how is it that the worst evangelist who has the greatest revival in history—how does he respond to that? If you can grasp what he's going through, if you can picture this in a baseball setting, you've got an ESPN interviewer.

He says, "I'm in the winning dugout, I'm interviewing Jonah, a prophet, the man of the hour. Jonah, what happened out there? Ninth inning, you're down by one, two outs, a man on first base. You're the winning run. Two outs, two strikes, and you bunted. And somehow you ended up making it all the way around the bases. You're the first person to get an infield park home run on a bunt. And I say "home run," but you walked ... to every base. At Sportscenter,

we're calling it the "home walk." It looked like you didn't even want to score that winning run. That's what it looked like. Well, anyway, we're calling it the miracle of the day. Congratulations. You won it for the team. How do you feel?"

That's what happened. And Jonah says, "I'm angry with great anger."

Now if he were to say that on TV as a baseball player, what would you assume? I'd think that Jonah actually bet money on the other team. He's not even playing for his own team. That's what is happening here. He says he has great anger.

By the way, "great" is a word that we have to pay attention to, because it not only gives meaning to what's being communicated, but also, we find that's where the humor and sometimes the irony is that's taking place in this short story. You'll see that Nineveh is called "the great city," God appoints "a great storm" and then "great winds" and "a great fish."

Jonah 3:10

When the Lord saw what they did, and how they turned from their evil ways, He relented.

And then here we go in verse 3:10. Here's that story again and how it ends. "And when the Lord saw what Nineveh did and how they had turned from their evil ways,"—"evil" is another repeated word—"He relented."

Jonah 4:1

But all this was grievous to Jonah, a great evil, and he was very angry.

And here's how Jonah responds. Here's the interview. "But all this was grievous to Jonah, a great evil. And he was very angry." God forgives Nineveh and it's evil—no, sorry—it is a great evil. This is the first time that "great" is going to be used with another repeated word throughout the book—"evil." The author is saving it for Jonah here, that this is a great evil. It's at this time in the story, the first time these words are together. The "great evil" in this story—here's the punchline—is God's lovingkindness. And Jonah's anger is towards that.

Jonah does not love what God loves. That's the story. That's the tension. If you review the first couple of chapters, Jonah receives that same lovingkindness when he is saved in the

belly of the fish. That's fine. But when Nineveh gets that same attribute of God, it's evil—no, it's a great evil.

When you and I read this book as one of the original readers, the Jews and Israelites, would read this book, we assume and we take on that the tension in the story (which is everything—you lose the tension, you lose the reader) is there's a huge problem that God has to resolve. What is God going to do with these wicked Ninevites? How could God possibly break through this violent and vile people? And the satire is that that's not the big problem. That's not the tension at all. The big problem that God has is with Jonah. This man of God, a prophet, is smug, self-righteous, condescending. And now he's resentful. He's resentful because ... well, it leads to the second prayer. Here's his second prayer. Here's why he's so resentful.

Jonah 4:2

And he prayed to the Lord and said, “O Lord, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish; for I knew that You are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster.

“And he prayed to God Almighty—he prayed to Jehovah, and he said, ‘Oh, Jehovah, is not this what I said when I was yet in my own country? And this is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish. For I just knew that you are a gracious God, merciful, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love, relenting from disaster.’ *I knew what kind of God you are.*

And if you were listening and picked it up, it sounds like something familiar. It sounds like our “Lord’s Prayer.” His quote here when he says, “I knew that you were a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love, relenting from disaster”--that’s a direct quote from one of the most holy scripts in the entire Bible. This is one of the most famous confessions from God himself, describing himself.

This section that Jonah is calling God out for as being evil is found in the Book of Exodus in chapter 34. The story goes like this. There’s the golden calf scene that I think many of you know from the movies where Moses is up on the mountain getting the Ten Commandments. They start worshiping an idol, which is a violation of the first three commandments. But they worship this golden calf. Moses comes down and throws the Ten Commandments on the ground.

They shatter, there is discipline, and the people repent. And now they have a new second set of commandments, and God has said, *I'll give you another chance*. God is relentlessly merciful to them.

And this major hinge moment in the history of Israel and in Moses' relationship with God, Moses cries out and says, "God, show me Your glory. Show me Your wonder, show me Your holiness."

And Yahweh obliges. And while Moses is hiding in the crack of these two rocks, Yahweh walks by and says, *I want to introduce myself to creation*. And these are the words He defines himself by. These are the words that uses to brag on himself. He says, "Yahweh, Yahweh, gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger, abounding in love and truth." This prayer from Jonah is a direct quote from that. Listen, this is what the Lord brags about, that we can run and hide behind. This is how He defines himself, as opposed to any other false gods.

Jonah 4:3-4

"Therefore now, O Lord, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live."

⁴ And the Lord said, "Do you do well to be angry?"

This is what causes Jonah to beg and to plead. Look what the next verse says. Knowing these things about the Lord, he says, "Therefore now, O Jehovah, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live."

The lovingkindness of God is what brings Jonah to wanting to have his own life end.

Pause. God's response. "And the Lord said, 'Do you do well to be this angry?'"

Jonah has a sick soul. That's the tension here. His first prayer is, "Oh, dear God, let me live." His second prayer is, "Oh, dear God, let me die." *No, actually, dear God, you kill me. And do You know why? Because of Your lovingkindness. That's why.*

Jonah does not love what God loves. Jonah does not love God Almighty. If you love someone, you love what they love. But Jonah does not love what God loves.

Here's the question for the entire script. *You love what I love, right, Jonah? Right? We're on the same team? No? I don't know.*

The knowledge of God is very far from the love for Him.

---Blaise Pascal

Pascal said that the knowledge of God and the love of God have a great distance between them.

You can tell you have made God in your image when it turns out He hates all the same people you do.

--Anne Lamott

I love what the writer Anne Lamott says: “You can tell you have made God in your own image when it turns out He hates all the same people you do.” *[laughter]* Isn’t that the truth?

So, Jonah’s finding out that God doesn’t hate the same people that he does. He doesn’t ever hate people. This is the tension in the story, right here. This is the key, that God Almighty, the sovereign God in this book here, is having to break through the hard heart of Jonah. And the question before us is, What is it going to take to soften this man’s soul? Because a great storm and great winds and a great fish and a revival in a great city didn’t do any of that. That revival in the great city was a great evil in the broken heart of Jonah.

What God Does with Jonah and How He Changes Us

And so, here’s the key. I want us all to watch and listen closely, because we’re going to see what God does about how to fix such a stubborn, broken heart. And the reason I want us to do that is because He’s going to do that in our lives. In other words, what God is about to do in the heart and soul of Jonah to unbreak this stubbornness, He does in our lives as well. God Almighty is the same before and He is now. He’s still doing those things. God is still working. He is still ruling.

So, here's what happens next in the story. Nineveh appears to be saved, but there's still hope that they could be napalmed. And so, Jonah goes up to the east side of the city. There's a hill there. And he sets up a little booth and finds himself under some shade, because it's the Middle East and it's hot. And so, he's sitting there, looking, hoping, ready to watch. Maybe God will relent on relenting and he'll get a first row seat of the destruction of Nineveh. And here's what happens from there.

Jonah 4:6

Now the Lord God appointed a plant and made it come up over Jonah, that it might be a shade over his head, to save him from his discomfort. So Jonah was exceedingly glad because of the plant.

Here's all that sovereignty again—"Now Jehovah God appointed a plant and made it come up over Jonah, that it might be a shade over his head, to save him from his discomfort. So Jonah was exceedingly glad because of the plant. He had great joy because of the plant." Literally, it says "he was rejoicing with great joy." And the reason it says he was rejoicing with great joy in Hebrew is because it is the same grammatical sentence structure as in chapter 4, verse 1, where he was greatly angry, "angry with great anger." And now he's joyful with great joy.

The author is mocking him here. You only need to read one commentary.

The narrator repeated the construction to emphasize the contrast between Jonah's anger that Nineveh was spared and the joy that he has from his discomfort being relieved.

Jonah 4:7-8a

But when dawn came up the next day, God appointed a worm that attacked the plant, so that it withered. ⁸ When the sun rose, God appointed a scorching east wind, and the sun beat down on the head of Jonah so that he was faint.

Here it goes. It gets better. "But when dawn came the next day, God appointed a worm that attacked that same plant, so that it withered. When the sun rose"—He's turning up the heat,

literally—“God appointed a scorching east wind, and the sun beat down on the head of Jonah so that he was faint”—which leads to Jonah’s third prayer.

Jonah 4:8b-9

And he asked that he might die and said, “It is better for me to die than to live.”

⁹ But God said to Jonah, “Is it right for you to be angry about the plant?”

And he said, “Yes, I do well to be angry, angry enough to die.”

“And he asked that he might die and said, ‘It is better for me to die than it is for me to live.’” Waah. And so, “God said to Jonah, ‘Is it right for you to be angry about the plant?’ And he said, ‘Yes, I do well to be angry, angry enough to die.’”

Pop quiz—see how you guys are going with the story. What does it take for Jonah, the great prophet, to become suicidal unto death? *Dear God, strike me down dead.* One, a hundred and twenty thousand Ninevites find themselves face down worshipping the God of creation, hoping to be spared. Two, a plant dies. Three, all of the above. It’s all of the above. And that’s the satire. I mean, one of the greatest jokes in this book, at least from my point of view, is how this guy gets his own book in the Bible. Do you know what I mean? I mean, it’s like, *Sure, we need a chapter, we need another book here. Let’s fill it in. How about this Jonah guy?*

I don’t think you want this guy in the Bible.

No, really. We’ll make him a joke.

How do you fix a broken believer? That’s the tension in the story, and that’s what is happening here. And the key to this is the fact that he is stubborn.

In the New Testament when Paul writes about this stubborn pride and stubborn self-righteousness that leads us to condemnation, the word for “stubborn” in Greek is the word that have translated as “sclerosis.” Cirrhosis of the liver—have you heard of that? Or sclerosis of the heart? It’s when soft tissue becomes hard tissue. It’s the hardening of the heart. It was literal and it became figurative. It’s the hardening of the heart.

How does God help a believer who has a hard heart? How does He make them well, make them healthy? How does He soften that up? Because a true, mature believer—know this

definition—is defined by this: a thick skin with a soft heart. An immature believer has a thin skin and a hard heart. Your life, in growing to become like Christ in all of life, is making a choice. Are you going to keep that skin thick and keep your heart soft?

How God Intervenes in Our Lives

This is what God is up to. This is what I'm thrilled to tell you about today. Because this is how God Almighty changes people. This is how He breaks through. If you find yourself becoming like Christ in parts of your life, and in other parts you feel like you're stuck, listen to this. Watch this story. If you're in a relationship and you guys are kind of butting heads and you don't know how to get out of it, this is the prayer I pray. This helps—right here. There are two ways that God breaks through a stubborn, hard heart—sclerosis of the soul.

One, through stories. Believe it or not, stories have a powerful, stealthy capability if you choose to pray about it and get involved in the story. I mean, stories around us—literal stories around us—or movies, and the Bible for sure, because they're teaching us empathy. If we get involved in those stories and we pray to God, “Dear God, show me my part in my story and how it fits into this story ...” Again, stories have this powerful, stealthy ability, so that once we put our shields down and allow the message to penetrate, we can have empathy for the injury that we've caused other people. And when that takes place, we find ourselves having a tender heart.

And is it any wonder that Jesus, the greatest teacher of all time, is known and famous for all His storytelling? And He does that because the people that he's talking to have hearts of stone. And He keeps giving them more analogies and more stories. *Hey, do you understand what you need to do?*

So, the easy way is to pray and watch the stories around you and see how God is teaching you that you're like Jonah or you're like Betty, or that you shouldn't be like John—whatever it might be.

Here's the hard way, and I'm also a big fan of this. This is what is happening here. You pray this prayer as well. You say, “God, give me the story so that I get empathy, so that I know how it feels to be the receiver of what I'm giving.” Did I say that right? So, you pray to God, “God, since you're still appointing plants and appointing worms and appointing scorching suns, could you work Your sovereignty in my life”—it's no hardship for Him—“so that I can feel what

I'm giving? Then maybe I'll get some empathy, and that empathy will change this." God Almighty is still working now. Pray for it; watch for it.

I mean, it's almost like "Do unto others and God will do it unto you." And you will find it out for yourself, if you pray, that He's out to soften our souls. And you ask and you'll receive. And you seek and you'll find. You knock, and He's going to open this door. Because empathy is something He desires for us to have so that we can change, so that we're not going to be stuck like Jonah here.

Years ago, I saw this pattern where I was looking for ways God could teach me, because I have a hard soul. And my brother and I had gotten into quite a little skirmish at an event. And let me just say that our relationship was over. And it was kind of my fault, but I didn't know what to do about it, because I didn't do anything wrong, and it wasn't my fault. But nothing was going to happen and it was only going to get worse.

So, I prayed this prayer: "Lord, You know, I'm looking for stories and that's not working. The easy way didn't work, so I'm going for the hard way." And so, an event took place in my life where I was a recipient of someone else's actions, and it wasn't their fault, and they meant well, and it stung. The next thing you know, I'm writing a two-page apology to my brother Mark. And our relationship was restored, renewed. I prayed, "God, what I've done unto others, You do unto me, and I'm going to be looking for You to teach me this way."

This is how God changes people. This is God trying to win over this rebel prophet. And the way He does it is He says, *Hey, I'm going to get you to fall in love with a plant.* He's going to have compassion. The key word is going to be "compassion" or "pity." It means "attachment to." And he's just trying to say, *Look, if you have compassion or pity for this plant, maybe there's hope for you. You can connect to something. And then when it's lost you can appreciate the way I feel.*

Jonah 4:10

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. ¹¹ 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?”

We’ll see how that happens, but this is the point of it. This is why—so that God can say these final words. “And the Lord said, ‘You have pity or compassion on this 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?’” They don’t know right from wrong. “And also, they have a lot of cattle.” That’s the joke of it. They’re bringing in the cattle again. The cattle are thinking, *Yeah, Jonah, what about us, first of all? And second of all, why are we being brought into this story?*” The cattle are just cows, man. *And not to mention we did the sackcloth thing. So, moo to you, Jonah.* That’s why He keeps bringing up these cows, because Jonah doesn’t even care about the cows.

The point is this. *You love what I love, right, Jonah? Right? You love what I love. There are 120,000 people here who don’t know right from wrong, and maybe even the cows.* He’s trying to get him to show compassion. *You have compassion on what I have compassion on, right, Jonah? You have pity on what I have pity on, right, Jonah?*

The Hebrew word for “compassion” and “pity” is often used for “grief.” It’s because when you have an attachment to someone you love, or something, and you lose that, you grieve that. You grieve that thing that’s lost. And that is a broken heart, as opposed to a hard heart.

So, He’s asking, *What breaks my heart, Jonah, is that going to break your heart?* This lesson in empathy starts with a plant, but it ends with humans who are eternal. *Temporary plants—how about 120,000 eternal beings? Can you attach to that?*

Here’s the profound part of this. This is amazing. Jonah has pity, compassion, attachment, love, for a plant. And the reason is because, first of all, he needed it. And the second is that it gave him comfort. And God has compassion and pity and love, and He’s attached himself to the Ninevites, and He doesn’t need anything.

We often find ourselves in love or loving things or having pity or compassion towards things that we get to enjoy the attributes of. God created everything. God needs nothing. He is completely and perfectly content within the Trinity. And yet, why does He attach himself in His compassion to these Ninevites, or to you or to me?

Here's why. Because pure compassion is voluntary. God chose to attach himself. God chose to love the Ninevites. "For God so loved the world that He sent His only Son." Why did He love us? He chose to. And true, holy, pure compassion is a voluntary attachment to something that you don't have to have and you can't anything out of it.

And that's why the final sentence here in the story is this: "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?" *How about all those cows, Jonah? Do you love what I love, Jonah?*

And if you look in your Bibles and turn the page, there's nothing after that. Nothing follows that. That's the end of the story. The story ends with Nineveh down at the bottom of the hill, and up on the hill is Jonah. Do you know what it is? It's the Grinch.



You know when the Grinch steals everything on Christmas Eve and he sits up on that high point and he's looking down? Why? Because his heart is so tiny and hardened. And he's

just up there because he wants a good view of sorrow. Well, right next to him is a prophet named Jonah. And he's there to see the napalm fall at a safe distance. He wants to see these people evaporated, this great city. *And what about those cattle, Jonah? What did they do?* He doesn't care.

The last words, essentially, are this. *You love what I love, right, Jonah?* And there's no answer. Who writes a story like that? There's no ending.

Jesus Tells a Similar Story

You fast forward about a few hundred years and you'll see Jesus, God the Son, having the same problem as God the Father. He comes to planet Earth and reaches out to the Jewish people, and it looks like the villains are acting like heroes and the heroes are acting like villains. Because in Jesus' ministry, when He talks to people who are notoriously famous for their sinful lives—prostitutes, tax collectors, even Roman soldiers—we find stories about them repenting and rejoicing and falling face down to the severe mercy of God and being grateful. Meanwhile the religious leaders who are supposed to be heroes here are resentful. They are resentful towards Jesus, because they are the standard of what it means to be good, and they're the one who get to distribute the lovingkindness of God to whom they choose.

And so, what does Jesus do? He's out to change the hardened hearts of these religious leaders. He's telling story after story, trying to get them involved. There's a guy who was forgiven ten million dollars, and then on the way out of town he beats up some guy who owes him twenty bucks. Wow—who would do such a thing like that? The religious leaders. You're missing it.

He tells a story about a man going to prayer at the synagogue, and his prayer is, “Oh, God, you're lucky to have me. It's a good thing I'm not like that guy in the back. He's a regular sinner.”

And what's he praying? “God, just be merciful to me.”

And God is saying, *The hero is the villain in this one, and the villain is the hero.* He's just trying to tell stories to see if He can break through any of the sclerosis of the soul that these guys have.

And then He tells a short story, and it's the greatest short story that's ever been told. And so many people miss the point. Because in the greatest short story that's ever been told by Jesus,

people misunderstand who the target of the story is. It's about these religious, self-righteous men and women with hard hearts, like me and you. They're angry that Jesus is spending so much time with the Ninevites of the time.

And so, Jesus tells this story. He says that there's this loving father and he has two sons. And one is lost at home and one is lost afar. Now the younger son takes his father's inheritance and goes to a distant land and squanders it—squanders it to the point (and there's satire in this one) where this Jewish young man finds himself tending pigs. Jewish man tending pigs ... And he's so hungry, he looks at one of the pigs and says, *Hey, you through with that food? I'll take your leftovers.* That's rock bottom. He comes to his senses and says, *You know what? I'd be better off as a hired hand at my dad's ranch than working for these pigs.*

And so, he practices his lines about coming back and repenting to his loving father, and he's going to say, *I don't expect to be a son. I just want to be a ranch hand. That's it. I'll start at the bottom.* And on his way in, his skeletal remains are coming over the horizon, and his father has never given up on his son. And he sees him at a distance, and the father humiliates himself, culturally, in multiple ways. First, he runs toward the boy. And he grabs him and hugs him and kisses him. The boy hits the play button and starts his lines: "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I'm not coming back here to be a son. I just want to ..."

And the father cuts him off and starts barking at his servants and saying, "Quick, right now, hurry up, go get the best robe I own, put it on the young man. We need a ring for him. He's part of the family. Put slippers or shoes on him. He's not a servant. He's one of the owners." And then he says this: "Go get the fatted calf. We're going to slaughter it, because we're going to celebrate. We're going to eat and we're going to celebrate. Why is that? Because this son—I thought he was dead, and now he's alive. He was lost and now he's found." Boom!

It's not the end of the story. That's chapter 3 in Jonah. Nineveh repents. God celebrates. He is overcome with joy. And then chapter 4 of Jonah for the next part of the story, the target. The sons of Jonah are the religious leaders who this story is written about. They are lost. They're just as lost, they're just lost at home. The older son comes in from the field where he's been working hard and diligently and legalistically. And he comes home and hears people eating and dancing. And he won't even go into the house and won't have any part of that. And he finds out through one of the servants what all the celebration and dancing is about. Your brother—he's safe. He's well. He's doing great. And so, he commits himself to being angry with great anger

because of his father's compassion. And so, the father, having great compassion for the second son, just like he had great compassion for the first son and humiliated himself—this time he humiliates himself again and goes outside the party that he's hosting and goes to that older son and entreats him. He is begging his son to come inside and enjoy himself with the father.

And the son said, "Well, what about me? I mean, I've been straight and narrow the whole time. I've been here. You could predict it. And I don't remember a time when you slaughtered a fatted calf for me and my friends. And him—that son of yours—threw away all that money on prostitutes, squandered it. What's to celebrate?"

And the steadfast lovingkindness of the father answered him and said, "We have to celebrate. We have to have pity on this brother of yours because he was lost and now he's found. He was dead and now he's alive. And so, we have to."

And there's no ending to the story, just like the other story where there is no ending. The end of the prodigal son story is, *You love what I love, right, son? Right? You love what I love, right?*

See, these are the two best short stories ever written. And they end the exact same way. They end without an ending. And they do that because we're supposed to answer the question. The story is a mirror. And the question is, *You love what God loves, right? Right?*

Lord, I'd ask that You would soften our hard hearts. And I'd first and foremost ask that it would be through the stories around us, like the two we just told; that we would have compassion and pity towards the things that are eternal, that You've chosen voluntarily to have compassion and pity towards. And there is nothing that we won't do—there's no place we won't go, there's no gift we won't give, there's no words we won't say, to bring something into existence that would cause You great joy. Because we love what You love. You love people, all the people.

And Lord, I'd ask that You would help us--break our hearts to have the empathy, whether that means killing a plant or whatever it takes—that we might be willing to go anywhere to do anything at any time with anyone—that You just send us and we'll go. It's Your will, Your way. There is no person who is beyond Your grace. Lord, for the Jonahs and older brothers, the Pharisees and Sadducees, I'd ask that You would cut us to the quick. Tenderize our hearts and souls, that we would never miss a celebration in Your honor. We want to love what You love. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

