

5 Jonah had gone out and sat down at a place east of the city. There he made himself a shelter, sat in its shade and waited to see what would happen to the city. **6** Then the Lord God provided a leafy plant and made it grow up over Jonah to give shade for his head to ease his discomfort, and Jonah was very happy about the plant. **7** But at dawn the next day God provided a worm, which chewed the plant so that it withered. **8** When the sun rose, God provided a scorching east wind, and the sun blazed on Jonah's head so that he grew faint. He wanted to die, and said, "It would be better for me to die than to live."

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

"It is," he said. "And I'm so angry I wish I were dead."

10 But the Lord said, "You have been concerned about this plant, though you did not tend it or make it grow. It sprang up overnight and died overnight. **11** And should I not have concern for the great city of Nineveh, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left—and also many animals?"

Pointless?

I'm beginning to think sermon introductions a preparation are a bit pointless. Sometimes it feels like an exercise in futility trying to find something that ties the whole lesson together and encapsulates a message down to a single point. Especially this week when I learn that Jonah without any preparation whatsoever walks into the city of Nineveh for one day and preaches a half hearted sermon to a people he doesn't care about and he walks away before finishing. Just when you think it can't get any worse, he's met with success.

So is preparation pointless? You're not Nineveh and I'm not Jonah. What it really comes down to is that Jonah didn't care for people. He wanted to withhold God's grace from those he deemed less worthy. This small book of Jonah is packed with powerful themes of racism, rebellion, and a gracious God who calls to people completely unworthy of his grace and mercy.

You might not think we have anything in common with Jonah. But have you ever felt pointless? Nothing to say. Don't know what to say. Let alone tell anyone the reason for the hope you have. Or maybe you find it difficult to tell those who have hurt you. You may feel like a pointless prophet. You might feel like Jonah. You're not pointless. You have a point. You can point people to Jesus.

Jonah would have to point the Ninevites to God. But Nineveh wasn't just any city. They are the great-great grandparents of Isis. It was the capital city of Assyria the greatest world power of that time. This is an empire that would destroy the kingdom of Israel within

decades of Jonah's work. Mercy for Nineveh would mean destruction, death, and deportation for Israel - Jonah's home and people.

Understandable that Jonah doesn't want to go. He's unwilling. It's almost as if God set aside the requirements for prophets when it came to Jonah. Jonah has no interest, passion, and demonstrates no potential to be a prophet. When told to go East, he heads West. When instructed to go to Nineveh the second time he doesn't wait to hear what he's supposed to say. When he gets there he preaches a short-half hearted sermon - the worst sermon ever - coming in second only to my sermon last week. Jonah began to walk through the city for one day, he doesn't even make it through the whole city but the Ninevites put on sackcloth and ashes. They repent. Word arrives to the king. This is the greatest success ever. God relents bringing judgment on Nineveh. While most children's stories end with a moralistic story of a God who gives 2nd chances that's not the end of Jonah.

After success we find an argument between God and his pouting prophet. *"Isn't this what I said, Lord, when I was still at home? That is what I tried to forestall by fleeing to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity.* Jonah is quoting from the John 3:16 of the Old testament. He's quoting Exodus 34:6,7. And he sees this as a reason to be angry with God. That's also when we discover the real reason why Jonah didn't want to go and preach to Nineveh. It wasn't because he was afraid he wouldn't know what to say or that they might kill him. He was afraid they might actually listen to this words and live. Jonah has no compassion for these people. He wants them dead. Jonah is a pointless prophet who wishes for the destruction of the people he's sent to serve.

And he complains, "You're too merciful. You're too gracious." He resents the most fundamental attributes of God. *Now, Lord, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live.*" Jonah would rather die than live with a God like that. After one day of poor preaching, he walks out on the job, heads up a mountain East of the city and waits for destruction. He's a pointless prophet and if he is met with success it's in spite of his efforts and not because of them.

God hasn't called us specifically to rush off to Nineveh and preach, *"Forty more days and Nineveh will be destroyed."* But we have a much broader call to , *"Make disciples of all nations."* We also have a much broader message of forgiveness which is for all people. Christianity is not limited by culture or geographic boundaries. The book of Jonah isn't for us to look back and say, 'I'd never do those things.'" The book of Jonah leads us to ask the

question of Jonah and then turn and look at our own hearts. What about us? Shouldn't we have compassion on all people?

Then you realize that Nineveh doesn't have to be a capital city a nation, a state, or even an entire generation. Nineveh could be the family and friends, the co-workers and those who have crossed political parties that you love to hate. Nineveh for us might be those who are responsible for the destruction of everything you love and hold near and dear to your heart. It's difficult to bring a message of a forgiving God who is gracious to others when we want them to die. But with the moral decay and decline of society we might see no point in saying anything. You may question God, "Why am I still here?" And even vent frustration like Jonah, *"Take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live."*

Christians wouldn't take our life into our hands. We'd rather start talking about end of world and how great it will be when God finally comes again in all of his glory and destroys all those who persecute. Come quickly Lord, and burn them. We have more in common with Jonah than we let along especially when we fail to have compassion. We may forget about how patient God is, not wanting any to perish. We selfishly think only of our own comfort and try to control to whom God extends his grace. Like Jonah we end up as pointless people walking away from those whom God has placed in our life.

Though we may walk out on our call. God points us back. God goes to his pouting prophet. He pursues his prophet not only in defiance to his commands, out on a boat where God provided a wind, to the depths of the sea where he provided a fish and even now he heads out of the city - like the Father of the Prodigal Son when he had to go out to the elder son in the field.

*God provided a leafy plant and made it grow up over Jonah to give shade for his head to ease his discomfort, and Jonah was very happy about the plant. But at dawn the next day God provided a worm, which chewed the plant so that it withered. When the sun rose, God provided a scorching east wind, and the sun blazed on Jonah's head so that he grew faint. God provides a plant, a worm, and a scorching east wind. Jonah may have finished his work but **the main point remains**. Again God asks, *Is it right for you to be angry about the plant?*" Jonah turns God's question into a statement. *"It is," he said. "And I'm so angry I wish I were dead."**

God reminded Jonah that he didn't create the plant, he didn't cultivate or care for the plant. Jonah's only upset because of the comfort he received from the plant. But God is invested in his creation. He created the people of Nineveh. He's watched them grow. God asks, *"should I not have concern for the great city of Nineveh, in which there are more than a*

hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left—and also many animals?”

God cares. He even cares about the animals in that city. God sent a prophet to preach repentance to Gentile people. God was gracious with Nineveh. God was gracious with Jonah and now we have a book named, “Jonah.” Where Jonah is described not as the hero who rushed out and saved so many but as a racist reluctant prophet who doesn’t want anything to do with these people. Jonah is not the hero. God is. And even after Jonah’s death his book still points us to the God who enabled him to see the grace God extends to Nineveh is the same grace extended to himself.

God is gracious with us. Thankfully he didn’t send Jonah. Instead he sent his Son, who also went outside of Jerusalem and looked back, not waiting for destruction but weeping over rejection. *“Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing.*

Jesus had compassion on them for they were harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd. Jesus had compassion he literally suffered with the people. He took on their pain, their problems, their sickness and he suffered for them and in their place. The cross is the answer to God’s question, *“Should I not have compassion on these people?”* Yes I will have compassion on this world. God then sends out people who are often like Jonah: pointless. Pointing away from Jesus. Pointing to themselves. Pointing in the wrong direction. God forgives these sins points us in the right direction.

And yet often in spite of his people God works through them. He creates compassion in us so we care for those who are different. Shall we not have compassion on all people? We haven’t created them, cared for them, raised them but our God who sent his son for us does and has cared for them. People are dying in unbelief.

Life may feel pointless and without purpose. It may not feel as if you’ve done any good. You may not know what to say. Keep it simple. Remember Jonah. He may have been a pointless prophet but even now he still points us back to a gracious God. Remember where you point. You point to your gracious God who sent his son to save. If God is able to use a pathetic prophet like Jonah, I’m sure he’s able to make use of us as well.