

A little girl came home from school excited, b/c she had just learned the story of “Snow White and the (7) Dwarfs.” She couldn’t wait to tell the story to her mom. When she got to the part where the prince kisses Snow White and she awoke from her sleep, the girl asked, “Mom, do you know what happened next?” The mom said, “They lived happily ever after?” The girl said, “Oh no! Worse. They got married.”

We all like stories w/ happy endings, but not all stories end as we’d like. If Jonah’s story had ended w/ ch. 3, everybody would’ve been a winner. Nineveh would’ve been spared, God would’ve been glorified, and Jonah would’ve walked away w/ the Nobel Peace Prize – that’s a “happy ever after” ending – but then comes ch. 4. **(Read *Jonah 4:1-11*)**

Honestly. I’m at a loss for words. Not that any of us are any better than Jonah, but I’m struck w/ a sense of frustration and embarrassment for him. Maybe its b/c I’ve been rooting for him to come full circle. Maybe its b/c I see too much of Jonah in my own life and I want to see God win the day in Jonah like I want Him to win the day in me. Maybe it’s simply b/c I like happy ending and I’m saddened by what should’ve been a sweet story.

Yet this ending does teach us about what matters most to God – **People matter most to God and therefore they should matter to us.**

In the moment, Jonah missed this truth. Fortunately, he eventually got it or else we wouldn't have this book. But in the moment, he didn't get it. Frankly, I'm afraid we don't get it either. Sadly, too often, the church doesn't appear to get it either; and I can assure you the world doesn't get it.

On May 15, 2006, Englishman David Sharp died while trying to climb Mt. Everest freezing to death in Green Boots Cave on the NE ridge of Everest. While tragic, his death wasn't unusual as there have been some 200 people who have died in the past 60 yrs. trying to climb Everest. It's not that he died, but how he died that's so unbelievable. He died sitting cross-legged in the snow in a frozen stupor while more than 40 people walked right past him. Seeing he was dying, knowing he was in trouble, realizing he needed help, these climbers pressed on b/c they had paid tens of thousands of dollars for this once in a life-time experience. Even Sir Edmund Hillary, the 1st man to climb Everest, expressed indignation and outrage. What happened? They decided what really mattered at that moment wasn't trying to save a man's life, but trying to get to the top of a mountain. Forty people let a man die w/out even trying to help him.

As I read the story learning temperatures can drop to 100° below zero and winds can howl at over 100 mph – that skin can freeze instantaneously and frostbite can set in w/in seconds – **it hit me that the coldest thing on the mountain that day were the hearts of 40 people who didn't understand what really matters.**

TRUTH: What matters to God is what should matter to us.

Until we see God for who He is and we see people the way God sees them, we'll never understand what really matters, and we will find ourselves questioning God at every turn. This is what happened to Jonah; **he made the mistake of thinking God's will should look like his will.** And the result left him scratching his bald, sun-burned head.

I The DISPLEASURE of Misplaced Priorities

But Jonah was greatly displeased and became angry. He prayed to the LORD, "LORD, is this not what I said when I was still at home? That is why I was so quick to flee 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. 4:1-2

Why was Jonah so angry? He was angry over what had happened in ch. 3. He was ticked that God was gracious to the Ninevites and spared them b/c he would've zapped them.

Now don't miss the obvious. Jonah was mad b/c he knew God was going to be gracious to Nineveh. He lost his cool and his perspective b/c God had shown mercy and grace – not just to a sinful city, but to Nineveh, the arch-enemy of Israel. **Jonah was angry, b/c God was being God.**

Jonah knew in advance this was going to happen, b/c he knew the character/nature of God. He confessed this was the reason he fled to Tarshish. **He basically admitted he thought he was worthy to receive God's grace but he didn't think the Ninevites deserved God's favor.**

WOW! Who died and left Jonah God for the day! Let's not forget who Jonah was. He was a prophet of God – a man of God – who b/c of personal bias lost sight of God's will and heart for people. He forgot what matters most to God.

What Jonah was saying in effect was, “I can understand how God loves me. I'm a Jew. I'm his missionary. I've lived a good life, but how in the world could God love them?” Jonah was acting like the big brother in the Prodigal Son or like a Pharisee. **He was more focused on the mud on the outside than on the man on the inside.**

And we do this too. I get why God loves me; I'm American. I'm a Christian. I'm a heterosexual. I'm special. We sometimes get the idea God only loves people like us.

Isn't this what happened to the women at the well. In spite of here gender, race, ethnicity and activity – God still loved her.

What Jonah forgot was that God loves everyone equally.

This doesn't mean God condones sinful attitudes/behavior – **HE DOESN'T!** But rather, that even the righteous, when they become religious, can engage sinful behavior b/c they get too big for their britches and think they're the only people worthy of grace.

What Jonah was showing was that he was farther away from God in some ways than the people in Nineveh.

When our reputation is more important than character, and pleasing ourselves and our friends is more important than pleasing God, then we're in danger of becoming like Jonah and living to defend our prejudices instead of fulfilling our spiritual responsibilities. *Wiersbe*

Let me say this in a different way. **The most selfish people on earth are people who don't care whether other people go to heaven or not as long as they get there themselves.**

What Jonah misplaced is what many of us often forget – a prophet needs as much of God's grace as any pagan. A Christian needs God's grace as much as a non-Christian.

We ought to be joyful God loves the Muslim as much as He loves the Methodist. He loves the Buddhist as much as He loves the Baptists. He loves the pagan as much as he loves the Pentecostal. He loves those outside the church as much as He loves those inside the church. *Merritt*

Which brings us to the great lesson in this text – **God is a God of love who prefers mercy over wrath, forgiveness over punishment, and grace over judgment.** Why? B/c He is a God who loves everyone – *for God so loved the world...*

The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise as some understand slowness. He is patient w/ you, not wanting anyone to perish, but all to come to repentance. 2 Pt. 3:9

Jonah misplaced that **PEOPLE MATTER TO GOD!** And no matter what our priorities might be, they'll never change His priority of redeeming people to Himself.

One night Robert Ingersoll was delivering a lecture against Christ in which he took out his watch and said, "I'll give God a chance to prove He exists and is almighty. I challenge Him to strike me dead w/in 5 min.!" Needless to say, his challenge created a great sense of uneasiness. After 5 min., Ingersoll, exclaimed, "See! There's no God. I'm still alive!" After the lecture, a man said to a Christian lady, "Ingersoll certainly proved something tonight!" She replied. "Yes he did. He proved God isn't taking orders from atheists."

Jonah's response to God is a wonderful reminder that even when we have misplaced priorities and seek our worst instead of God's best – God never loses sight of his great priority that – **PEOPLE MATTER TO GOD!**

II The **DISCIPLINE** of the Master's Provision

Jonah went 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. Then the LORD God provided a vine and made it grow up over Jonah to give shade for his head to ease his discomfort, and Jonah was very happy about the vine. Jonah 4:5-6

Upon delivering the message and seeing the people repent, our Pouting Prophet continued his pity-party as headed for the hills to set up a lookout where he apparently was hoping to see God go against His nature and thump the Ninevites.

In that moment, God probably should've thumped Jonah, but instead, **God move gently and gave Jonah something he didn't deserve** – SHADE. Now I've never been to this area of our world, but it is my understanding temperatures can get upwards of 120° degrees. So God in His grace provided some kind of plant to provide Jonah w/ refreshment.

It doesn't matter what kind of plant it was. What matters is it was a gift of grace – and Jonah didn't deserve it.

All Jonah deserved was God's discipline. Did you notice Jonah never bothered to ask where this miraculous plant came from? I can assure you he was happy it sprang up, but b/c he was so self-absorbed and angry, he didn't recognize the blessing over him.

Once again, God was trying to speak into Jonah's life and he missed it. But what if Jonah would've stopped to see what was happening? What if he would've gotten the message? Remember, he missed it when God sent the storm and he wound up in the belly of a fish. This time, God sent a plant, but instead of getting the message – Jonah got a sunburn.

Sadly, like us, **Jonah was more grateful for the gift than he was for the giver.** So just about the time he was settling in the shade to sip his iced tea, God sent a hungry worm to devour the plant to once again get his attention.

But at dawn the next day God provided a worm, which chewed the vine so 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. He wanted to die, and said, 'It would be better for me to die than to live.' But God said to Jonah, 'Do you have a right to be angry about the vine?' 'I do,' he said. 'I am angry enough to die.' But the LORD said, 'You have been concerned about this vine, though you did not tend it or make it grow. It sprang up overnight and died overnight.' Jonah 4:7-10

Folks, we don't have to be so hard-headed and hard-hearted. If we'd just stop fighting God and start obeying Him – even when we don't like it or agree w/ Him – then our lives just might experience the miraculous.

B/c Jonah forgot that **PEOPLE MATTER TO GOD**, Jonah was more concerned about a plant than he was about people.

He was more concerned about shade than he was about souls. Jonah had more pity and more passion for material and temporal than he did for the spiritual and eternal.

I think Paul got this when he wrote: *Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.* Col. 3:1-2

What about us? Are we more concerned about our lives or about the eternal lives of others? Are we more consumed w/ our well-being or for the well-being of others?

What would happen if someone walked into our church wearing tattered jeans, a dirty t-shirt, and flip-flops? What would we see and think? Would we see beyond the obvious to see the person underneath the attire? *The clothes aren't going to last, but the person wearing them will last forever.*

We should be grateful for a God who gives us grace, love, forgiveness and compassion even when we don't deserve it. We ought to be grateful God uses us to give that same grace, mercy, and forgiveness to others. And we will if we ever get that what matters to God – people – should matter to us too.

Which brings us to verse 11. Did you know that only two books of the Bible close w/ a question – Nahum and Jonah?

But Nineveh has more than a 120,000 people who cannot tell their right hand from their left, and many cattle as well. Should I not be concerned about that great city? Jonah 4:11

Talk about a palpable moment. I'm certain you could've heard a pin drop in Jonah's soul. God went straight to the heart of the issue in Jonah's heart. And notice Jonah didn't answer. Do you know why? B/c he knew the answer.

Let me tell you the difference b/w the God we serve and every other god being served in our world – our God saves. It is true Nineveh didn't get what they deserved, but this is the lesson God wanted to teach Jonah and us.

God doesn't want anyone to get what they deserve. He would rather give grace – this is why He died on the cross. But God will not prevent people from rejecting Him if they so choose to say “no” to His offer; but if they'll embrace His grace, then he will save them.

For God so loved the world he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already b/c they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. Jn. 3:16-18

Ultimately, what is the lesson of Jonah? One teacher asked her class, "What is the lesson of Jonah?" A boy raised his hand and said, "People make whales sick." No, that's not the lesson. The lesson of Jonah is – **what matters to God is people, therefore, people are what should matter to us.**

Jonah's gospel might not have ended well, but the story isn't finished yet. There can still be a happy ending if we will care about the things that matter most to God – PEOPLE.

There's a story about when Henry Ford purchased a large insurance policy that it became public knowledge b/c the Detroit newspapers reported the story. One of Ford's friends in the insurance business read the story and confronted Ford to see if the story was true. When Ford assured him it was true, his friend asked him why Ford didn't purchase the policy from him. Ford's replied, "You never asked me."

When it comes to Christ – how many of our friends would say, "You never asked me." **God's concern is people.**