

“That Great City”

Jonah: Renegade Prophet, Pt 8

So we’re looking for the last time at the book of Jonah. We come to the end of the story. And maybe now we can ask ourselves the question, “What’s the story about?” We’ve pulled a lot out of it – eight weeks out of a four chapter book. But big picture, what *is* the story about? A story has to have a protagonist and an antagonist. Who is the protagonist? Who is the one who agonizes for the good – proto-agonizer; did you know that’s what that means? English minor!

And the answer is, it’s not Jonah who is the protagonist. The fish isn’t the protagonist. It all comes down to the last question of the chapter. In the last question – the very last line of the story - God says, **Jonah 4:11**, “*But Nineveh has more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left, and many cattle as well. **Should I not be concerned** about that great city?” “Should I not be *concerned*...?” That’s a word that means to be moved with pity or compassion. “Should I not have compassion? Should I not love that great city?”*

And it’s an argumentative question. So this is what the story is about. It’s about God, who is the protagonist, seeking to bring grace and love and mercy to a big city. And the antagonists – as represented by Jonah - are the religious, moral people who believe in God and who obey His commandments. It’s us. It’s city-disdaining, city-phobic, religious, moral, good people. We’re the antagonists, and God is the protagonist.

And the book is about God’s love for a big, unbelieving, unjust, violent, pagan city. So what are we supposed to learn then about the city from this book? That’s the last question we have to ask as we look through it. And I would just suggest we learn three things here. We learn about God’s call *to* the city, God’s view *of* the city, and God’s love *for* the city.

Now, the **first** thing we learn is remarkable. **It’s God’s call *to* the city.** What unites this book together is three times - three! - God speaks to Jonah of what He calls Nineveh, “that great city.” **Jonah 1:1-2**, “*The word of the Lord came to Jonah son of Amittai: “Go to **the great city** of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me.”*” Chapter 3, after the fish incident, (**Jonah 3:1-2**) “*Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time: “Go to **the great city** of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you.”*” And here at the very end again, but now, if anything, it’s clearer than ever.

Over and over and over and over again, God says to his prophet, “I want you to go to and I want you to *love* that great big, huge, dangerous city.” See, what God is doing is calling Jonah out of a homogenous place where everybody looked like him and believed like him into the big city. He is calling Jonah out of a *safe* place, a *comfortable* place, a *familiar* place, into the big city. Over and over God does it. *That’s* the call of God. “Go to the great city. Love the great city.”

Now, somebody says, “Well, okay. Now wait a minute. Are you generalizing this? This is for Jonah. And Jonah is a prophet, and Jonah had a particular purpose in God’s plan. God wanted Jonah to go to Nineveh, to Assyria, but that’s just Jonah, is it not?” Well, we have to have a balance here. If we stand back and look what the Bible says, here’s what we learn.

First of all, this is by no means a unique kind of call. Two to three very sad centuries after this Jonah story, the Jews are captive. They’ve been conquered, not by the Assyrian empire, but by *their* successors, the great Babylonian empire. And they’re taken to the next great world-class city that was to come after Nineveh, which is Babylon. And if you want to read what happened, in Jeremiah 27 through 29 it records how the Jewish exiles came to the outskirts of Babylon.

And they said, “Well, this is terrible. We’ve been taken to Babylonia, but that doesn’t mean we have to go *into* Babylon itself.”

And so they started to set up camp and said, “Well, let’s stay out here. Let’s stay away from the city. Let’s form our own little community outside the city so we can be free from the violence and the doctrinal and moral and cultural pollution of the city. Let’s stay outside.” You know, same reason some of you moved to Dripping Springs! Come on, this has always been a big drive behind suburbs. But *shockingly*, God writes them a letter through Jeremiah, which you can read in Jeremiah chapter 29.

And there God says, “No, I want you to move into the city. I want you to *settle* in the city. I want you to build homes and raise your families. I want you to settle in the city, and I want you to make *its* life *your* life. I don’t just want you to prosper your own little believing ghetto inside. I want you to pray for and seek the shalom - the peace, the health, the prosperity - of the *whole* city. I want you to bless it. I want you to make it whole in *all* of its functions, in *all* of its aspects.” It’s astounding.

Centuries later, fast forward to the New Testament church and if you read the book of Acts carefully – as a lot of sociologists and historians have been doing over the past few decades - you will see the early missionaries, the first messengers with the gospel who went out into the Mediterranean had a completely urban-centric focus. That’s especially true of Paul and his missionary strategy.

When they went into any region, they went to the very biggest city. And then after they had planted Christian communities in there, they left. They appeared to ignore the villages and countryside –that’s admittedly an argument from silence, but those are the examples that we have. And as a result, by the year AD 300 or so, roughly 50 percent of the populations of the *urban* centers of the Greco-Roman world were Christian, whereas the countryside and the villages were all pagan.

In fact, the word “pagan” comes from the Greek word *paganus*, which means a man of the country, a rustic villager. Of course, we all know as the cities go, so goes the culture. As cities go, the society goes. And because God called the early Christians to be urbanites and to be strategically *in* the city, as a result, the Roman Empire was really just swept through by the gospel.

And that pattern continued so that throughout the history of the Christianity in this world, the center of institutional church life has always drifted to the city – be it Rome or Paris or Constantinople or London. God calls His people to the great city.

But why? *Why* does God call to the city? There’s a head reason and a heart reason. The head reason is very interesting, but the heart reason is even more powerful, I think. The **head reason** is attached to this word “great”- not just go to Nineveh, but “I want you to go to Nineveh, the *great* city.” Right? Every time. “That *great* city.”

Now all the Hebrew scholars say this word has two aspects to its meaning – it means “big” and it means “important”. And so “great” is a perfect translation because it does the same thing in English. Think about when we say “She’s a *great* woman” and “we had a *great* crowd” – the first means important and the second means large in number.

So on the one hand, what God is saying is, “I want you to go the *strategic* city.” See? I mean, it’s common sense. If you have the message of the gospel that has the power to transform the world what are you supposed to do with that message? You don’t just sit down in some comfortable little corner of the world. How dare you! You go to the city. You take the message to where it can make the most impact.

In the village, you might reach the artists, but if you want to reach the art *world*, it's in the city. In the village, you might reach the lawyer, but if you want to reach the *legal profession*, it's in the city. And also in the village or in the rural area, you generally have racial homogeneity, but in the city, my goodness, even our little church has people from five different continents in attendance. You see? The gospel is meant to have global impact – “Go to the ends of the world”, Jesus said. And just strategically, you go to the big cities because that's where the ports are. Trade – in ideas as well as goods.

And so there's a head reason that just makes sense. Why go to the city? Because as the cities go, so goes the society. But there's a **heart reason** as well. Look, Jonah doesn't want to be in that city. What does he do as soon as he's done preaching? He moves out. Look at it again in v. 5-6, “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. 6 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 went *out* from the city to watch, still hoping something bad would happen to it. He goes *out*. He leaves. And he finds a shelter – a vine, it's leafy, and it's beautiful. Notice he was very glad for it. Of course! Why not? Shade and green. It must have been a lovely little place – a park.

But at the very end, here's what God says, v.10-11, “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. 11 But Nineveh has more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left, and many cattle as well. Should I not be **concerned** about that great city?”

Look at the logic here. He uses the same word – we said it means strong compassion. But the Lord said, “You have *compassion*, you have been concerned about this vine. You have affection. You love the vine.” That's all fine and good, but what does God have strong compassion for? “But Nineveh has more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left...”. It's extremely emotional. God is saying *120,000 people* who don't know which way to turn spiritually. Look at *the size* of that. Look at the depth of that.

See, God is *contrasting* Jonah's love for the plant with His love for the city. I once heard an inner-city minister say something like; “The country is where you have more plants than people and the city is where you have more people than plants. And since God loves people far more than plants, He must love the city far more than the country.” Now, I'm not trying to start a country mouse-city mouse feud, but there's truth to this.

Let me press it to you. As beautiful as a tree is...“I think that I shall never see a poem lovely as a tree.” Wrong! Because I don’t care what you believe in your head in Philosophy 101. You *know* a tree is nowhere near as precious and as beautiful and as amazing as a human being. You know that! Why do environmental protestors chain themselves to trees? You’ll never kill a human to take out a tree. That would be a horrible tragedy. I love trees. God loves trees. But you’ll save the person.

And here’s what God is saying. He says there’s nothing more amazing, there’s nothing more beautiful, there’s nothing more astounding, there’s nothing more precious than a person. Look at MoPac at rush hour. Is that the most beautiful thing you’ve ever seen? It is to God! Every car is chock-full of the most beautiful thing on the earth. Every street is *crammed* with the most beautiful thing on the earth. The city is *filled* with beauty. The city is filled with people. So God has a call to the city.

Now, the **second** thing we learn here is not just that God calls us to the city but we see **God’s view of the city.** God’s extremely nuanced view of the city. What do I mean by nuanced? In a world that wants to put everyone in a restrictive category, God won’t play along. You see that with how He interacted with the city. On the one hand, God seems very moral. You know He says to Jonah in chapter 1, “Go and preach *against* Nineveh, for its wickedness has come up against me.”

And then when Jonah comes in, Jonah denounces their violence and their injustice, and he says, “Forty more days, and Nineveh will be destroyed.” So God is saying through the prophet, “Repent Nineveh. You’re wicked. You’re evil. You’re unjust. You’re violent. I’m going to overthrow you - whatever that would have entailed - in 40 days.” And so God sounds rather conservative, doesn’t He? God sounds sort of like what we would call in Austin a kind of traditional values guy, a very conservative moral person.

But then there are other places in this book where God seems to act like what any conservative would call the most bleeding-heart liberal possible. See now first of all, as we saw a while back, why does God relent? Why is Jonah so freaked out over the fact that God has relented? God is *not* going to punish Nineveh.

As we mentioned a couple weeks ago, when the Ninevites repent, they don’t use Yahweh’s name. they use a generic name for god. They don’t call on the Lord of Israel. They’re not entering into a new covenant with Him. They’re not converting. What they’re simply saying is, “Maybe you’re right. Maybe we have been too violent. We’re really sorry. Please don’t hurt us.” And God relents. And we know from history, and therefore, certainly God knew, that though it was probably sincere and heartfelt, it was superficial. There’s no indication from history that Assyria was anything by wicked and evil.

And so here's Jonah. Why is he freaked out? He says in chapters 2, 3, and 4, "God, you bleeding-heart liberal. You'll forgive anybody! The most, little half-hearted look in your direction, and you give them a second chance. What's the *matter* with you? I can't take your tolerance." They didn't convert. God is just being patient with them.

Not only that, there's that interesting place here where God mentions their cattle as well. We haven't talked about that part yet. Why mention the animals? Is God an animal lover? Well of course He is, but I don't think that's all of it in this context. What did those cattle represent in that day and age? They weren't pets. Where do you keep your wealth? I mean you can get some of it out of an ATM, but most if it is stored in little pieces of cyber script on tiny microchips in computers in various places. But back then, your money was a little bigger. It was hairier. It took up more space, and it needed to be fed two or three times a day, because the livestock is the economy of the city.

And here's God, see, concerned about the city, the shalom of the city. All of it. The economy of the city. The safety of the city. The housing of the city. That's what he was saying in Jeremiah 29. He is not *just* filled with love for the individual souls. He is filled with love for *the city*. So now is God a conservative or a liberal here?

Is He a God who is thundering, "You'd better repent" and trying to get people to convert and talking about their wickedness, or is He somebody concerned about the social system and willing to live and work with religiously diverse people and tolerate them and listen to them? Which is it? Isn't it weird? Isn't it nuanced? No wonder Jonah can't handle God. Can you? Can I? God won't be squeezed into our little boxes.

And God's view of the city here is simply reflecting what the whole Bible tells us about the very nature of human history. Let me tell you what the nature of human history is. And I'm going to reference a very famous figure in church history to do so. Saint Augustine, 4th and 5th Century Bishop of Hippo, the great African theologian who probably influenced Western Christianity more than any other human being after the Bible.

He wrote a very influential book in 426 AD called *The City of God*. Let me show you why it's so influential still today. When *we* think of a date in history that spelled disaster for a great city, what do we think of? We say, "Where were you on...September 11, right?" That was the big day, the day the world shook. But back in the ancient times was another day: August 24. Do you know what happened on August 24, 410?

That was the day Alaric and his army of the Goths breached the wall and sacked Rome. For the first time in over 800 years, Rome had fallen, and not to some grand foe, but to barbarians. And they burned and plundered and killed, but three days later they just took off. They didn't stay and occupy or anything. They just wrecked havoc and left. But the damage was done. Damage that went way beyond the physical destruction.

Rome was sacked by *barbarians*? Impossible! How could this be? And there was an *enormous* shockwave that went through the *entire* intellectual, cultural, social, and emotional world as a result. On the one hand, what people were saying was, "If Rome is not safe, what's safe? If Rome can fall, we can all fall." But it wasn't just simply a physical thing, it was deeply psychological. People were saying, "The impossible has happened, the unthinkable has happened ..." This was unthinkable! "If the unthinkable has happened, how do I know I'm thinking right about anything else?" *Everything* was thrown into uncertainty. *Everything* was up for grabs.

Relevant, don't you think? I would argue the "sack of New York" on 9/11 has had similar psychological ramifications. And just like now, the Christians were every bit as shattered as the pagans. And the reason for that was in the last 100 years before the fall of Rome, Christians had been starting to move up. They had been starting to move up into the city, up into the circles of

power in Rome. They were moving up into the areas of influence and of government and business and so on.

And everybody said, "This is the way God is going to do it. If we win Rome, we've won the world. This is how God is going to *do* it. This is how God is going to spread the gospel through the world. But now why has God *abandoned* us? What's going on? Why did God let this happen?" And into this vacuum came Augustine, who wrote a book called *The City of God*, the greatest of his books. He studied the Bible. He looked at Rome. He looked at the situation, and he said essentially these two things. "First of all, one of the reasons why you're all absolutely freaking out is you have confused the eternal city - *civitas aeternalis*, that's what Rome called itself - with the city of God." There *is* no eternal human city. He says there is only *one* city that cannot be broken. There's only *one* city that cannot be torched. There's only one city that cannot be bombed. There's only *one* city! It's the city of God.

If you remember the city of God, you're absolutely safe. Because you see, if you kill the members of the city of earth, it's game over, the city is gone. But he says if you kill the members of the city of God, all you're doing is moving them to *better quarters* in the city. You *can't* kill the city of God. Augustine used a text from **Psalms 46:4-5**, "*There is a river whose streams make glad **the city of God**, the holy place where the Most High dwells. God is within her, **she will not fall**; God will help her at break of day.*"

Do you understand the imagery? A city with a river going through it can't be besieged, right? You see, you would besiege a city, and you would starve them out. That's how you'd do it. You'd weaken them, and then you went in. Because they were starving, they were eating each other. And it was terrible. There was no food. There was no water. But you *can't* besiege a city with a river going through it, because they would *always* have water, and therefore they'd always have food.

And as a result, what Augustine is saying is there is one city and there's *only* one city where you're safe. And if you are freaking out, it's because you think your real wealth is in this earthly city. But there is no eternal city on earth. There is no secure human city, but if you're in the city of God, you're safe. That is a city that *has* to triumph, that *will* triumph. Nothing can stop it.

And do you know what? Augustine was absolutely right, because Rome *did* break down. It did not recover. Society for centuries became really broken down – The Dark Ages! And partly because Augustine helped give the church a theological way to process it, what happened? The city of God continued. If you want to read more about this on your own, I would recommend a great little book called *How the Irish Saved Civilization*. Half-Price Books always has copies and it's a very accessible read. But what it really means is how Irish *Christians* saved civilization.

You see, you can kill individuals in the church, but you can't kill the church. Because the church is a counterculture. It's an alternate city. And when everything else was falling apart, the Christian community went forward. It kept learning alive. It kept art alive. It kept justice alive. It kept peace alive. It kept love alive. Those monks and nuns saved Western civilization.

And so first of all, Augustine said, "If you're freaking out, it's because you have over identified, you have confused, the city of man with the city of God. But then he says, on the other hand, now if you stop there, you're going to make a mistake. Because Augustine is *not* saying, "Therefore, this bad old wicked city, who needs it? Bad old Rome. Who cares about it?" Not at all. Because at the end of the book of the Bible, what do we read?

At the end of the Bible, it says, **Revelation 21:2**, "*I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.*" And in the middle of the city was the throne of God and of the Lamb. What's going on at the end of the world? At the end of time, at the end of history, what goes on?

Not we go *out* of the world into some ethereal place. We get our end-times theology mixed up, the rapture is not the end of the story. But the city of God - this city that cannot be broken, this city that cannot be burned, this city that cannot be stopped - is *coming down* to cleanse and to purify and to renew and to heal the cities of the world. It's coming down! We're not leaving to go to it. It's coming down to us.

And what Augustine essentially says is, "Here's how you know you are really a citizen of the city of God. You are the very, very *best* citizens in the cities of this world. The best!" He says, "Christians, if you say, 'Let's all go out into the desert. Let's get away from the city of man,' do you know what you're going to have out there in the desert? Another city of *man*, because you're men and women. You're human beings."

The city of God is not good people next to the bad people. The city of God is the spirit of God and the gospel of the kingdom *changing* the political community of this world, which is built on self-interest and power – *all* human politics are based on self-interest and power - and turning it more and more into a political community of God, which is based on concern for His name, love for the other, not just about what you can get, but what you can *give*, not dominating *over* with power but serving *under* with love.

That's the city of God! And to illustrate what it looks like in the real world, Augustine referenced two great plagues that happened in earlier centuries. One of the reasons why the Christians were growing in number is tied to a huge plague in AD 165 that went through and killed off at least a quarter of the people in all the cities. Huge numbers of people died. And then 100 years later, there was another horrible plague. This is what happened in both cases.

Here is the pagan writer, Thucydides, a witness to what happened. He said, "The doctors were quite incapable of treating the disease...Equally useless were prayers made in the temples...People were afraid to visit one another. And as a result, they died with no one to look after them; indeed there were many houses in which all the inhabitants perished through lack of any attention..." Corona-virus ain't got nothing on this plague!

"The bodies of the dying were heaped one on top of the other, and half-dead creatures could be seen staggering about in the streets...For the catastrophe was so overwhelming that men ... became indifferent to every rule of religion or of law...[Many] pushed the sufferers away and fled from their dearest, throwing them into the roads before they were dead...hoping thereby to avert the spread and contagion...As for the gods, it seemed to be the same thing...when one saw the good and the bad dying indiscriminately."

Do you see what they're saying? Good religious people, the pagans, they're good people! They try to obey the gods and follow the gods. But when all this showed up, they said, "What good is there in being moral or being good? The *good* people are dying with the *bad* people!" And they freaked. They ran. They dropped their beloveds in the streets.

But the early Christians were different. And this is also an eyewitness account written by a guy named Dionysius: "Most of our brother Christians showed unbounded love and loyalty, never sparing themselves and thinking only of one another. Heedless of danger, they took charge of the sick, attending to their every need and ministering to them in Christ, and with them departed this life serenely happy; for they were infected by others with the disease...and cheerfully accepting their pains...The best of our brothers lost their lives in this manner, a number of presbyters, deacons, and laymen..."

Biological terror, but the Christians stayed put. Not only did they stay put, but they gave their lives nursing both Christians *and* pagans who were dying. Why? *Because* they were citizens of the city of God...they were the very, very, very *best* citizens of the earthly city. In fact, that's how you know you *are* a citizen in the city of God. Isn't that amazing? I want you to keep that in mind as you watch the news in the coming days.

So Augustine said if you believe in the two cities, that every city is two cities and a Christian is a citizen of *both*, if you over-identify or under-identify, if you detach like Jonah and go outside and wait for its condemnation – you know, "Good riddance!" - you'll be a conservative or a liberal. But if you believe in the theology of the Bible, you're a citizen of *both* cities. In fact, your citizenship in the city of God makes you the very best citizen in the city of man.

Now somebody says, "How can I do that? That's very inspiring. That's very heroic. But I could never do that!" But of course you can. What's more, it's imperative to our world that you do. Now more than ever, as Richard Nixon's campaign slogan extolled. Let me show you how. Two things: Look at Jonah's opposite, and look at Jonah's response.

What do we mean by that? Look at Jonah's opposite. Jonah goes outside the city to condemn it, right? He goes outside the city hoping bad things will happen. There was another prophet who, years later, went outside the city. We read about him in **Hebrews 13:12-14**, "*And so Jesus also suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy through his own blood. Let us, then, go to him outside the camp, bearing the disgrace he bore. For here we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for the city that is to come.*"

Jonah went outside the city that spared his life to condemn it, but Jesus was dragged outside the city, weeping for it, and died for its salvation, not for its condemnation. Now what difference does that make? I left a little section out of that piece by Dionysius, the witness to how the Christians lived during the plague. Let me go back and let me put it back in.

He said, "Heedless of danger, they took charge of the sick, attending to their every need and ministering to them in Christ, and with them departed this life serenely happy; for they were infected by others with the disease ... and cheerfully accepting their pains. Many, in nursing and curing others, transferred their death to themselves and died in their stead..." Many of the Christians *cheerfully* took their neighbor's death on themselves by nursing them back to health, but in the process, died in their stead.

Where would you get an idea like that? Don't you see? The pagan people were good people, but do you remember what the pagan author said? He said, "When we saw the good and the bad dying together, we said, 'What the heck? What good is morality? What good is God?'" That's because they believed in salvation by works. It means they're good, moral people. But they don't understand the gospel.

At the heart of the gospel is a man who set the best example possible, and he had a terrible life. But he had a terrible life for you and me. And you see, what that does is it changes everything. Religion does not have the intellectual structure to deal with suffering. It says, "I lived a good life. They lived bad lives. Why are we all dying together? I don't get it." See?

Christianity says, "But we know we're not saved because we're good. We're saved only because we're willing to admit we're *not* good. And we know the only good person who ever lived suffered for us. Therefore, why can't *we* suffer for others? If in his suffering Jesus brought healing to the world, maybe in my suffering I can just do a *little bit* in his name to show other people what he has done for me."

Besides that, I'm safe now! See, that's the other thing. Religious people never know they're good enough. They're never sure that if they die they'll be with God. But the gospel says your relationship with God is not based on how good a performance *you've* done this week or last week or last month or last year but *Jesus'* performance. He lived the life you should have lived, and he died the death you should have died. And when you put your faith in him, you *know* you're there.

And that's the reason why you can be like George Herbert, the great Christian poet, who said death used to be an executioner, but the gospel has made him just a gardener. He used to be scared of death, but now he looks at death and says, "Go ahead. Give me your best shot. All you're going to do is make me something really great."

Moral, religious people were not able to handle social breakdown, biological terror, and the Christians *were* because citizenship in the city of God made them the very, very best possible neighbors and citizens in the earthly city. Why? Not because they were trying hard but because they looked at the anti-Jonah, the opposite of Jonah, the one who went out, not to condemn the city, but to save the city. Look to Jesus.

And then **lastly** we have to see **God's love for the city**. You say, "You know, this is all very nice, but I just don't believe it can happen to me. I don't believe I could ever have that kind of certainty and joy. I could never have that kind of sense of safety you say the gospel brings. I just don't believe it. I don't think I could *possibly* do the things those Christians did." Well, I don't think you're right. I mean, look at Jonah's response. Even Jonah can change. You say, "Well, how do you know Jonah changed?" Isn't the end frustrating? Do you see what's interesting?

You get to the very end, and this is the *last* time God comes to Jonah. He says, "Look, Jonah. I asked you once, and you blew it and I put you into a fish. I asked you twice, and you blew it. Now I'm asking you one more time. Will you come with Me in My project of spreading the city of God into the human city, spreading the city of love and service into the city of power and selfishness? Will you come with Me in doing that?"

And it leaves the story open ended. It's a brilliant literary device after all if the goal is to get us to ask how *we* would respond. But we don't know what Jonah did. Except I think maybe we do. Think about it, how do we know all this stuff about Jonah? How do we know Jonah was such an idiot? How do we know he was such a racist? How do we know he made that unbelievably stupid, "I hate the God of love" speech in the beginning of chapter 4? The only possible way we'd know is if Jonah told us – or told *somebody* who told us.

And what kind of man would let the world see what an ass he has been except someone who is so joyfully secure in God's love, someone who finally gets the gospel, who finally accepts the fact that he is simultaneously sinful but completely accepted. That's the only possible reason we'd even *know* any of this stuff. If God can change Jonah, God can change you. Love the city.

Can I confess something to you? Whenever somebody in the church says to me, “Man I can’t wait to get out of Austin!” Or “I hate Austin.” I know that they won’t be in our church for long. Because that’s not the vibe of this church. This is a church that loves the city. I love Austin. And more than that, God loves Austin. Because how can you not love a city of one million people who don’t know their right from their left? And many blind salamander as well!

And here’s what’s so ironic. Love Austin, but don’t *mistake* Austin for the city of God, because if you do, you won’t *be* a good lover of Austin. You won’t be the best possible lover of Austin. The best way to *really* love Austin is to know it’s *not* the city of God. It’s to recognize its shortcomings, to recognize what it needs. But if you’re a member of the city of God, then you can love the city of Austin like nobody else really. Love the city, and don’t be afraid.

Let us pray...