

Jonah, The Reluctant Missionary: A Biblical Response to Radical Islam
Jonah 4:1-11

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My goal for this morning is that, if you are a follower of Jesus, Paul's words in 2 Cor. 5: 16 would be true in your life, *"So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view."* The world of Islam, particularly since 9/11, has crashed into our consciousness and our lives, as you well know, and the default reaction is for us to regard Muslims from a worldly, dare I say, even an American, point of view.

This morning, we're going to peek into the Muslim's heart; we're going to look into our own hearts; and we're going to gaze into the heart of God. My desire is that you would grow in your understanding of Muslims by learning about their faith, for ignorance is often the cause of bias; that you would change in your attitude towards Muslims and have more of the heart of God for them; and that the change in your mind and heart would lead to a change in behavior, that you would actually now do something in response to being changed. And for that, we now turn to our text.

4:1, *"But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry."* A preacher has just preached a 5-word sermon and perhaps the greatest revival in human history happened and he's angry?! That is a strange preacher indeed. What is going on?

I. THE WICKEDNESS OF THE CITY, 1:2

It was a great city:

Nineveh was 550 miles to the Northeast of Israel, with a population over 600,000 people. It was the largest city in the world at the time of Jonah. The gardens of Nineveh were considered one of the Seven Wonders of the World. Its city had 1,500 towers. The walls were 100 feet high.

It was a wicked city, and its wickedness had now come up before God. Reminder about our own wickedness, it gathers, God waits, but some day He will deal with it. Gospel. . .

How wicked was it? Bill Cooper (EN Tech Journal, vol. 2, 1986, p. 107) says that the Assyrians were *"endowed with a viciousness and spite that has never been surpassed, perhaps only being equaled by the propagators of the Third Reich in recent times. However, whereas the Nazis at Nuremburg sought every means to deny or minimize their guilt, the Assyrians openly boasted of it, even recording for posterity their delight in inflicting unspeakable sufferings and genocide upon the surrounding nations. . . Their conquered subjects could only look forward to such 'benefits' as being impaled alive en masse, burnt, disemboweled, flayed alive, eyes and tongues torn out and other unspeakable atrocities, and Assyria stands alone among all the nations of the world in that all these murderous practices were deliberate and calculated policies of state."*

One of their kings, Ashur-nasir-pal II (883-859 B.C.) boasted, *"I built a pillar over against his city gate and I flayed all the chiefs who had revolted, and I covered the pillar with their skin. Some I walled up within the pillar, some I impaled upon the pillar on stakes, and others I bound to stakes round about the pillar. . . and I cut the limbs of the officers, of the royal officers who had rebelled. . . Many captives from among them I burned with fire, and many I took as living captives. From some I cut off their noses, their ears, and their fingers, of many I put out the eyes. I made one pillar of the living and another of heads, and I bound their heads to tree trunks round about the*

city. Their young men and maidens I burned in the fire. Twenty men I captured alive and I immured them in the wall of the palace. . .the rest of their warriors I consumed with thirst in the desert of the Euphrates." (W.G. Lambert, "The Reigns of Ashur-nasirpal II and Shalmaneser III: an Interpretation," *Iraq* 36 (1974), pp. 103-109.

Can you see why Jonah wanted to run away?! Tarshish was 2500 miles to the West in the southern tip of Spain. Jonah was willing to go **four times** as far out of the will of God as he was in the will of God! Why? It was not just that he was scared—it was that he wanted the Assyrians to get what they had coming to them. 4:2, he explains why he ran in the other direction. The Assyrians were the big bully on the block and no one could deal with them. They were threatening Israel and Jonah wanted God to take them out. So he fled to Tarshish because he knew that God was gracious and merciful and would forgive Israel's most hated enemy if they repented.

What is our Assyria today? I believe it is the Muslim world. It is a "great city." A 20/20 special last week said that there were 1.5 billion Muslims world-wide, or 22% of the world's population, and 2-3 million Muslims in the U.S., although those figures may be higher and are certainly going up with the rapid pace of immigration and natural growth rates. It's the second largest religious block in the world, after Christianity at 33%. When we moved into our home in Fishers 9 years ago, there was a nice little church on Lantern Rd. The next year they sold it to Muslims, and now there is a mosque and a school on that site, just across the pond from our home. You see them in your stores, your schools, your neighborhoods. It is a great city, and it is growing.

But is it a wicked city, like Nineveh? Particularly since 9/11, we in the States have viewed Muslims as the enemy. They have hurt us, they have killed our people, we are currently engaged in war against them, in fact someone in this church has died in that war. Here is an example of how many of us may feel about Muslims (redneck truck picture). If that is how you feel about Muslims, I can understand. But what I want you to do this morning is to no longer look at them from a worldly point of view. And to ask this question: Are they really the enemy? Or are they in fact, the victim of the Enemy?

Pastor Mark has asked me to preach about Islam this morning, because the American church in general is unacquainted about this massive group of people. Three important things to keep in mind as I talk about Islam today. First, I am not an Islamic scholar; I have not studied the religion extensively. But I was born and raised in a Muslim country, and later spent 14 years there, in Pakistan, as a missionary. I've lived over ½ my life in a Muslim context. I know Muslims. In fact, I was practically raised by them. My mother is a doctor who worked long hours at a mission hospital, and so as a baby and a toddler I was cared for during the days by a lady from a nearby village. A Muslim. In fact, I got so attached to her that when mom would come home from the hospital and reach out her hands to me, I would, or so I'm told, shrink back and prefer my Pakistani auntie. If I close my eyes and breathe in deeply, I can still remember the smell of her skin! We also had a local man do our cooking, so almost all the meals I ate at home growing up were prepared by a Muslim. So in that sense I know Islam well, from the inside. I'm a little bit like Mowgli from the Jungle Book, I've been raised in what you think is the jungle of Islam but what for me was just an ordinary childhood. And now I want to tell you about that jungle. And I do have the solution to the problem of Islam!

Second, there is no way that I can cover even a portion of the topic in a message this morning, and I'm confident that I won't answer all of your questions. Describing Islam is like answering the question, "So what is the weather like in America?" It's varied and complicated. I'd be happy to

talk, e-mail after; or visit the Crescent Project website, www.crescentproject.org or www.answering-islam.org

Third, and this is very important, I am speaking this morning from a religious perspective, from a Christian, biblical perspective, and not from a political one. The political issues are completely different from the ones we're going to talk about this morning. How a government should respond to radical Islam is very different, I believe, from how the church or an individual Christian should respond.

So, with that as preamble, let me ask, and try to answer 4 questions about Islam, as best as I can, from the perspective of Muslims.

1. **Where did it come from?**

Answer: Saudi Arabia, around A.D. 600, with the person of Muhammad. In [Michael H. Hart's *The 100: A Ranking of the Most Influential Persons in History*](#), Muhammad is described as the most influential person in history. We, of course, would disagree! But it does give you some measure of the significance of this man. So who was he?

He was a merchant, born in the city of Mecca, Saudi Arabia, in A.D. 570. Orphaned at an early age, he was raised by his uncle. At age 25, he married a wealthy widow named Khadija, and helped manage her caravan business. Discontented with life in Mecca, he retreated to a cave in the surrounding mountains for meditation and reflection. According to Islamic belief it was here, at age 40, in the month of Ramadan, where he received his first revelation from God. He was in a cave and he heard a voice, which he claimed to be the voice of the angel, Gabriel, that said, "Recite." And the first piece of the Quran was revealed to him. Over the next 23 years, he received further revelations until finally the Quran was completed with his death in A.D. 632.

Muhammad shared his first revelation with his wife and a few close friends. They believed him but very few others in Mecca did. So in 622, he left Mecca and moved to Medina, a city some 200 miles north of Mecca. There he was able to attract a small following and the new religion of Islam began to be established. He started to attack caravans coming from Mecca and the conflict culminated in the Battle of Badr in 624 in which he defeated his enemies, eventually taking over Mecca and, before his death in 632, control of much of the Arabian Peninsula.

So what were these revelations in the Quran? And why is the Quran such a big deal to Muslims, such that the threat of burning a Quran led to protests around the world and even the death of 5 people in a demonstration in Afghanistan? First of all, the fact that an essentially illiterate man could write such a beautiful piece of Arabic literature is claimed by Muslims to be Muhammad's one miracle (he did no other miracles), that which stamped him as a prophet from God. But more than that, the Quran, in their view, is a book that has existed from all eternity with God and was simply revealed, or brought down from heaven, to Muhammad. Sound familiar. Always with God. . .perfect. . .came down to earth. . .made God known. Have you heard that story before? That's why the Quran is so important to Muslims—it is more akin to how Christians view Jesus than how we view the Bible. So it is a sacred text, a holy book, it is always highly revered, placed on the highest shelf in a room, never put on the ground. And that is why the threat to burn the Quran is such an offence to them, one that they will kill over.

Several years ago an article with pictures appeared in an Urdu newspaper about a Muslim who was having tea in his own home. The tea kettle was on a small kerosene stove sitting on the dirt floor

of their house. After his first cup he reached over to pour another. The aluminum pot's handle was hot. He realized this after grabbing the handle. He quickly withdrew his hand. In so doing he dropped the pot on one edge of the stove, tipping it over. Kerosene spilled and caught fire. His Quran was on a nearby small table. Before he could save the Quran from the most dastardly deed a person could do, flames had reached the Quran. He grabbed his holy book and ran outside trying to tell people he had burned the Quran by accident. His thought was that by telling them right away, they would understand that it was accidental.

All his neighbors heard was, "I burned the Quran. I burned the Quran."

Explosively, this infuriated his Muslim friends & neighbors. A tractor was passing pulling a large trailer full of bricks. Men started grabbing bricks and throwing at the "infidel," as they understood him to be. He soon was unconscious, but the bricks kept coming. When everyone was satisfied they had done justice for the worst possible deed a person could do (other than blaspheme Allah or Mohd), they used the tractor to pull his dead body through the streets of Gujranwala so everyone would see the end result of insulting the book Allah had given their prophet Mohd.

So--our brother Fred has reason for concern. The so-called pastor publicly stating they will burn the Quran could do nothing stronger to stir up the emotions of Muslims. Muslims keep their holy book on the highest shelf in the house. They usually have a hand-made cover for the Quran. They kiss it when getting it from the shelf. They never put it on the floor.

Once a fellow missionary was shipping a box of Bibles from Lahore to Rawalpindi (near Islamabad). When the driver heard what was in the box, he ordered the men loading the truck to be sure that that box was at the very top of all the other things they were loading. He, a Muslim, recognized that the holy book of the Christians deserved the same respect they give to the Quran.

2. What do they believe?

The worldview of Muslims is quite similar to our own. Creator God, angels and demons, heaven and hell, final judgment, a series of prophets sent from God, including Abraham, Moses, David, and Jesus, the second greatest of all the prophets, in their view. So you may be asking, "Well then why did God send another book through another prophet when He had already spoken through the Bible?" They don't question that God spoke through these other prophets; in fact they believe in 4 holy books, the Tauret, Zabur, Injeel, and Quran. But they do question that we have an accurate record of the first 3. You see, we don't have any of those original autographs, in fact the closest even fragment of the Bible we have is from almost 100 years after it was first written. These books, originally perfect, were hand copied and mistakes crept in, Jews and Christians wandered from the truth, and so God had to make one final revelation to clarify His truth and clean up all the mistakes that had built up over several centuries. That final revelation was the Quran, and that is why Muhammad is viewed as the final prophet, or the seal of the prophets, and why his word trumps anything else ever revealed.

If you're real sharp, you may be wondering if mistakes then crept into the Quran, because the printing press wasn't invented for yet another 800 years. As Muhammad recited what the angel revealed to him and as his wife and other literate friends wrote those revelations down, copies began to be made. After Muhammad's death, they realized the same thing might happen to the Quran that happened to the Bible, so they brought together all the copies and fragments, made one official version, and burned all the rest. So their text is pure.

I've heard from Muslims many times the same thing that many liberal Christians say, that there are a few small differences between Christianity and Islam but nothing major. Well, there are a lot of

similarities. But the few differences there are are major. They center around the person and work of Jesus Christ. Muslims don't believe that Jesus is God. That, to them, is the worst possible heresy, because it means that there would then be more than one God. That is precisely what Muhammad was trying to wipe out in Arabia, the pervasive idolatry that he saw, even among the Jews and the Christians. Then you throw the Holy Spirit in there, and it gets really confusing!

The other thing Muslims don't believe is that Jesus was crucified on the cross. How, they ask, could God treat such a special prophet in such a despicable way? He would never do that. So one of their theories is someone who looked like Jesus was put on the cross in His place, and Jesus Himself escaped, made his way overland to India, and is buried in Kashmir. If you take away the deity of Christ and His death and resurrection, you have taken away the very heart of the Christian faith. In fact, you have become anti-Christ, for 1 Jn. 2:22, 23 say, *"Who is the liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, he who denies the Father and the Son. No one who denies the Son has the Father."*

So if they don't have a Savior, how do they hope to get to heaven? Two things: 1) They do not believe in original sin. We just miss the mark and yet have the capacity to right ourselves if we want. And, 2) One of the very central tenets of Islam is the absolute freedom and sovereignty of God. He is not bound by anything but can do whatever He chooses. This is why the love of God is not a dominant theme in Islam because once you love someone you are committed to their welfare; you are bound in a relationship. God is above that, He could never be limited or tied down. He is merciful, yes, to those to whom He wants to be merciful; He can be cruel to those to whom He wants to be cruel. He can let whomever He wants into heaven and send whomever He wants to hell. So on the great judgment day it will be completely His choice to decide every person's eternal destiny. Now, 2 things are going to work in your favor on that day. One is that if you are a Muslim, if you believe in Muhammad, he will intercede on your behalf. The other is that God has a record of your deeds, good and bad, in a scale, and he will pick that up and whichever side is heavier **may** determine your fate. But even then, you can never be sure; it is God's final choice. He could send the most righteous person to heaven and the worst sinner to hell.

How do you earn brownie points? By practicing the five pillars of Islam:

- 1) Say the Creed, "There is no God but God and Muhammad is His prophet."
- 2) Pray 5X/day
- 3) Fast during the month of Ramadan
- 4) Give alms to the poor, 2½ %
- 5) Make a pilgrimage to Mecca

I want you to understand that many, many Muslims are genuine in their search for God and their desire to please Him. Some of the most gracious people I know are Muslims. Many of them are far more religious, for more rigorous practitioners of their faith than most of us Christians, e.g. keeping the fast. As Paul says about the Jews in Rom. 10:2-4, *"They have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. For being ignorant of the righteousness that comes from God, and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes."*

Yet as good as the best Muslim is, they have no assurance of getting into heaven. But there is one ace in the hole. If you die in the cause of Islam, in *jihad*, you are guaranteed a place in Paradise. No wonder there is a non-ending stream of willing and eager suicide bombers.

And, frankly, if I believed that that was the only sure way of getting into heaven, I would be in line too.

3. What about terrorism?

I'd like to help you understand their thinking on this, because frankly to most of us it just seems barbaric and insane. Let me start by taking you to some passages in the Bible, Ps. 58:10, *"The righteous will be glad when they are avenged, when they bathe their feet in the blood of the wicked."* Ps. 149:6-9, *"May the praise of God be in their mouths and a double-edged sword in their hands. . .to inflict vengeance on the nations and punishment on the peoples. . .This is the glory of all his saints."* Ps. 137:8, 9, *"O Daughter of Babylon, doomed to destruction, happy is he who repays you for what you have done to us—he who seizes your infants and dashes them against the rocks."* There is a religious zeal in the OT to physically defeat the enemies of God, and it is this same zeal that fuels many in Islam today. Everything that is against God, every infidel (and to believe in more than one God, as they claim we Trinitarian Christians do, is the greatest form of heresy) must be crushed.

The word *Islam* comes from the Arabic root **s-l-m**. You might recognize a related Hebrew word, *shalom*, "peace", or the Arabic greeting, *salaam*, "peace" to you. So the lexical meaning of the word *Islam* (and a *Muslim* is a follower of Islam) is "peace." The question comes in your vision for how peace is attained. Peace can only be reached when one party submits, and this is the related meaning of the word "Islam." A Muslim is one who has submitted to God, and thus experienced peace. So the way Islam brings peace in the world is by getting people to submit. The world is divided into two camps, Dar-as-Salaam (the House of Peace) and Dar-as-Harb (the House of War). It is only when the House of War (non-Muslims) submit to the House of Peace (Muslims) that there will be peace between the two.

So how do you get the House of War to submit? Here there are a variety of answers within Islam. The Quran speaks quite pointedly to the need for this struggle, this *jihad*, to bring the unbelievers into the fold. [All quotations are taken from The Qur'an: Text, Translation, and Commentary, by Abdullah Yusuf Ali.]

2:193, *"And fight them on until these is no more tumult or oppression, and there prevail justice and faith in God."*

2:216, *"Fighting is prescribed for you, and ye dislike it. But it is possible that ye dislike a thing which is good for you, and that ye love a thing which is bad for you."*

8:12, *"I am with you; give firmness to the Believers: I will instill terror into the hearts of the Unbelievers: Smite ye above their necks and smite all their finger-tips off them."*

9:5, *"But when the forbidden months are past, then fight and slay the pagans wherever ye find them, and seize them, beleaguer them, and lie in wait for them in every stratagem (of war); But if they repent, and establish regular prayers and practice regular charity, then open the way for them; for God is oft-forgiving, most merciful."*

9:29, *"Fight those who believe not in God nor the Last Day, nor hold that forbidden which hath been forbidden by God and His apostle, nor acknowledge the Religion of Truth, (even if they are) of the People of the Book, until they pay the Jizya with willing submission, and feel themselves subdued."*

17:16,17, *"When we decide to destroy a population, we (first) send a definite order to those among them who are given the good things of this life and yet transgress; so that the word is proved true against them: then (it is) we destroy them utterly."*

22:11, *"How many were the populations we utterly destroyed because of their iniquities, setting up in their places other peoples?"*

47:4, "Therefore, when ye meet the Unbelievers (in fight), smite at their necks; at length, when ye have thoroughly subdued them, bind a bond firmly (on them): thereafter (is the time for) either generosity or ransom: until the war lays down its burdens. Thus (are ye commanded): but if it had been God's will, He could certainly have exacted retribution from them (Himself); but (He lets you fight) in order to test you, some with others. But those who are slain in the way of God,--He will never let their deeds be lost."

There is one other book important to Muslims, the Hadith, the traditions and teachings of Muhammad. Here are some references from the Hadith:

1,24, "I have been ordered to fight against the people until they testify that none has the right to be worshipped but Allah and that Muhammad is Allah's prophet, and offer prayers and give obligatory charity (taxes), so if they perform all that, then they save their lives and property."

1,25, "Allah's apostle was asked, 'What is the best deed?' He replied, 'To believe in Allah and his apostle.' The questioner then asked, 'What is the next in greatness?' He replied, 'To participate in Jihad in Allah's cause.'"

2,68, "Allah's apostle vanquished them by force and their warriors were killed; their children and women were taken as captives."

4,73, "Know that paradise is under the shades of the swords."

4,196, "I have been ordered to fight with the people till they way, "None has the right to be worshipped but Allah."

4,370, "Whoever has killed an enemy and has proof of that will possess his spoils."

5,716, "Turn the pagans out of the Arabian Peninsula." --the last words of Muhammad.

9,57, "Whoever changes his Muslim religion, kill him."

There are two main streams of interpretation of such passages, much as we have in biblical interpretation. One takes them symbolically, or metaphorically, and argues that this struggle, this *jihad* with unbelievers, should be by the pen and not by the sword. The other group takes them literally—and these are the radical Muslims. For them, it is war with the unbelievers, and in war any method of victory can be legitimized. So when they attack us, when they blow us up, when they behead captives, it is all in an attempt to restore the world to peace by forcing the submission of unbelievers.

But is this physical way of fighting the way of Muhammad himself? In fact, it was. I think it would be safe to say that if Muhammad had not fought, Islam would never have been established as a religion. When Muhammad was first trying to spread the faith in Mecca and was met with resistance and skepticism, his revelations had a more peaceful tone. Even after he moved to Medinah, he was received by the Jews and Christians there with, as Kenneth Craig says, "with amused disdain." So, interestingly, there in Medina he began to get these more aggressive revelations. It was as if the religion would have faced extinction without fighting and so that justified warfare. Now in fairness, he did bring peace to a large area of warring tribes and he treated those who submitted fairly. But the point, in stark contrast to our Savior, Jesus, is that the religion was established with the sword. And it continues to be propagated by the sword today by the "fundamentalists" of Islam, the literalists, the radicals.

So are all Muslims fundamentalists? Absolutely not. We must be careful of generalization. In broad strokes and as a wild guess, maybe 10% of Muslims would be radical; another large percentage would be sympathetic with the motivations of the radicals if not their tactics. But many are appalled at the actions of their fellow Muslim terrorists. So why don't they speak out more? There are a number of factors. One is their own fear. Another is that they don't have

much theologically to challenge them on. Any radical group springing up from within Christianity we could quickly debunk with the teachings of Jesus. Islam does have some teachings on peace, but as we have seen there is a lot on fighting as well and a strong precedent in the actions of their founder.

4. **Why do they hate us?**

Here, we start to get more in the political realm, and this is not the core of what I want to share this morning, but let me just mention 4 things:

1. Our support for Israel. Muslims consider themselves one big family, the *ummah* of Islam, so that an act against one Muslim is an act against all Muslims. When the Palestinians were moved out to create space for the state of Israel in 1948, that was an affront to all Muslims. They feel that if the U.S. had not been such a staunch supporter of Israel, they would have been able to push them back into the sea. And so we are responsible for that gigantic thorn in the flesh, right in the middle of what they consider to be their homeland.

2. Operating in an uneven manner as the world's policeman. We bring in troops and kill Muslims if oil is at stake; we ignore other hotspots like Rwanda or Kashmir since those don't affect us.

3. The evil cultural influence from the U.S. that has infiltrated the whole world. Hollywood and its values, etc.

4. There is probably a thread of resentment against our economic success and material advancement, far beyond most Muslim countries. Particularly, since for many centuries (7th through 14th), they were at the vanguard of cultural advance, the invention of algebra and innovations in architecture to name just two. Islam produced one of the greatest civilizations the world has ever known. While Europe wallowed in the mire of the Dark Ages, Islam produced advances in science, mathematics, literature, medicine, architecture, religion as well as many other fields of discipline. Islamic cities such as Baghdad were the premier centers of learning and folks flocked there from all over the world to study. When Europeans first saw Granada and other Moslem cities, they were stunned by the sophistication and beauty

Islam is a large city. Is it a wicked city? Yes—but so is any people or society or religious group that is caught in the trap of sin, deceived by the evil one, living in darkness.

II. **THE RELUCTANCE OF THE MISSIONARY**, 1:3; 4:1-9

In the face of a violent, hated enemy, WDJJ, What Did Jonah Do? He bailed—or tried to. Notice, **first**, that he fled from the Lord, 1:3. Then ch. 3 is like Take 2 (see outline in the notes) only this time he obeys, he preaches, hadn't even gotten very far through the city, when the whole place repents and believes in God, 3:5. The king himself then repents and issues a decree that everyone has to turn from their wicked ways. Has there ever been a faster, more comprehensive revival in history?!

Notice, **second**, Jonah's response, 4:1, literally in the Hebrew, "*it was badness to Jonah with great badness.*" It was, in his mind, an exceedingly evil thing that God had done and "his anger burned to him", he was hot with anger over the salvation of Nineveh. Because, you see, they didn't belong to the chosen people, they didn't deserve to be saved. He was angry that God was treating those outside the covenant with the same mercy He showed to those inside the covenant. And it was too much for him to bear. So he says, in v. 3, take my life for it's better for me to die than it is for me to see your mercy extend to these bloodthirsty pagans. When he was dying in the sea, he cried for God to save him. But now, when he is alive, he cries to God to kill him—because he is so bitter.

So Jonah, first, was **disobedient**. And second, he was a **bigot** and a racist. That's the only way to describe it. He had a Gentile complex. He needed to learn the lesson that Peter and the early church needed to learn in the book of Acts, when God let down the sheet from heaven full of clean and unclean animals and told Peter to kill and eat, and he at first refused, and finally when he understood, he said in 10:34, *"Truly I understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him."* God's salvation is big enough for everyone, in fact He "desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. 2:4) —and we need to open our hearts to make them as big as God's.

That's hard. There is a small minority of Christians in Pakistan, and in general they have a negative view of Muslims. You think Muslims have mistreated you here—imagine living under an Islamic government, in the midst of a vast Muslim majority, being discriminated against at every turn, yes, it's hard not to feel hatred for them. I just got an e-mail from one of our Egyptian members here are CPC: *Please pray for the Christians in Egypt, they are persecuted tremendously, today there were demonstrations after their Friday prayers calling for attacking Christians, churches, monasteries, priests, bishops.* The knee-jerk reaction is to either fight back or to withdraw in self-preservation. You can certainly understand the story that Greg Livingstone, the founder of Frontiers, told of challenging some Egyptian Christians with the need to share Christ with their Muslim neighbors, pleading with them to realize that if they didn't turn to Christ they would spend eternity in hell. One of the men turned to Greg and said, "So they're going to hell? Best place for them!" I wonder if that's how some of us feel. How like Jonah!

Third, notice how **self-centered** Jonah was? V. 4, God asked him if he had a right to be angry. Then Jonah heads outside the city and sets up camp—hoping, I think, that God might yet destroy them, v. 5. God was still gracious to this disobedient bigot, and provided him a plant, v. 6, to shade his head. Notice how quickly his mood changes. He had just been displeased exceedingly, when God had mercy on others; now when God has mercy on him, he's pumped. He's up for that. Literally, "happy with great happiness." What a worm.

But God's not done with the lesson yet. He provides, v. 7, a worm that kills the plant. There goes the comfort. Then in v. 8 God turns up the heat, like He sometimes does with us, He provides a scorching east wind and the sun beat down on Jonah and now, when God withdraws His mercy, Jonah is ready to die again. God pushes him a bit in v. 8 and asks if he has a right to be angry about the plant, and in his misery he cries out and says, Yes, I'm angry enough to die. Then God brings the point home in v. 10 and says you cared about that plant—which you had nothing to do with in the first place—because it protected you, it made you feel good. You cared about something that was a "son of a night", not lasting. But, and here is the key verse in the book, v. 11, you didn't care about a city with 120,000 innocent children in it!

So here is the question for us: Are we more concerned about our own ease, about the "plants" that God has provided for us in life, our bank accounts, our 401K's, our houses and cars and jobs, our kids' college education, our investments—whatever it is—than we are about lost souls?! If so, we are as pitiful as Jonah—and as far from the heart of God. We're no different from anyone else in our neighborhood. We've taken the blessings of God and hoarded them, wrapped our fingers around them, and refused to release them to bless the nations with the knowledge of salvation.

You may be disobedient; you may be a bigot; you may be self-centered. Maybe you're the reluctant missionary, like Jonah. So what do you do?

III. THE COMPASSION OF THE SAVIOR, 4:2,11

Jonah had his theology down cold. He says about God in v. 2:

Gracious: inclined, a disposition to show favor

Merciful: not giving someone what they do deserve

Slow to anger: long in the nostrils; does not immediately execute deserved judgment

Abounding in steadfast love: not just the beautiful word *hesed* but abundant in it

Relenting from disaster: He takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked

Do you know where he got that description of God from? Some 700 years earlier, Moses had asked God, *"Please show me your glory."* And God said, *"I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name."* Then He told Moses to hide in a cleft of the rock while He passed by, because Moses could not see God's face and live. Then, the Lord passed before him and Proclaimed, *"The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness . . . forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin. . ."* (Ex. 34:6,7). Jonah took that part of the divine nature which is the greatest glory of it and spoke of it as if it were an imperfection (Henry, p. 1298). He loved that part of God for Himself; He begrudged it for others.

How do we respond to radical Islam? If you don't know Jesus this morning, you won't have any interest in loving or helping Muslims; in fact, you can't do it, because it's not in you. But if you are a true son or daughter of your Father in heaven, you will want to—because He lives in you, in the Person of His Spirit.

Yes, there was religious warfare in the OT; but once Jesus came, it all changed. He is the Prince of Peace, He is the lamb who before his shearers was dumb and opened not His mouth. He is the One who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself—all for their salvation. He is the one who when the Samaritans did not receive him so that his disciples, in a fit of self-justification, asked Jesus, *"Lord, do you want us to tell fire to come down from heaven and consume them?"* (Lk. 9:54,55), Jesus responded by rebuking them. Because that is not His way—not at this point in time. Are there instances, as Pastor Terry Jones argued, where enough is enough and we have to stand up and stop backing down? Jesus never said so. Rather, the Scripture says, *"Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him; do not fret when men succeed in their ways, when they carry out their wicked schemes. Refrain from anger and turn from wrath: do not fret—it leads only to evil. For evil men will be cut off, but those who hope in the Lord will inherit the land."* (Ps. 37:7-9.)

But there's more than that. It is not just that we are not to fight back while we wait for God's judgment. He is the one who tells those who would follow Him, who would walk in His steps: *"Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you"* (Lk. 6:27,28), *"so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven."* (Mt. 5:44). Is evil being done in the name of Islam? Without a doubt. But God says, *"Do not repay anyone evil for evil. . .Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for god's wrath, for it is written: 'It is mine to avenge; I will repay,' says the Lord. . .Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good"* (Rm. 12:17-21). If the compassion of the God from whom salvation comes (3:9) fills us, we will do more than wait patiently for His judgment. We will not be willing that any should perish, as He is not willing, but that all should come to repentance. We will actually take them the message of salvation. For you see, they are not really the enemy at all; they are the victims of the Enemy. The god of this world has blinded their minds, "to keep them

from seeing the light of the Gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God" (2 Cor. 4:4). Of course they do bad things—every sinner does. What they need is a Savior to deliver them from their sins. Bumper sticker: Defeat terrorism; sponsor a missionary. That is the solution.

APPLICATION

The purpose of the book of Jonah (ESV Study Bible) is to "engage readers in theological reflection on the compassionate character of God and in self-reflection on the degree to which their own character reflects this compassion, to the end that they become vehicles of this compassion in the world God has made and cares deeply about." We've done some theological reflection; now it's time for you to do some personal reflection.

Why has this fortress of Islam so little penetrated by the Gospel of Jesus Christ? The answer, I believe, lies not in the wickedness of man—for God specializes in saving the "worst of sinners." The answer lies not in the weakness of the compassion of God, for He is abounding in lovingkindness. The answer, I believe, lies in the reluctance of the missionary, the unwillingness of the church to take the message of the compassion of God shown in Jesus Christ to the Nineveh of our generation. Salvation belongs to God! The gospel is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes. But first they must hear. And to hear there must be a messenger.

Story of Raymond Lull

Maybe there's a Raymond Lull here at CPC. The Muslim world is not going to be won by burning Qurans; it is only going to be overcome with good. But how is that good going to get there to them? There are media ministries, internet and satellite programs that are doing a tremendous job getting information out there. But I believe it is going to take a groundswell of Christian foot soldiers to make a beachhead in this great fortress of Islam. Not soldiers who will fight with the sword; but those who will be the salt and light of the life of Jesus Christ in the midst of Muslim communities. Those who will go and learn the language, love the people, show them the grace of Jesus Christ. People like the Hunts in the Caspian, incarnating the glory of God in His goodness, just as Jesus did. People like Joel and Amy Ericson in the UAE. . . People like Ron Washer is recruiting to go to Togo. . .

But not everybody will be called to do that. There are things you can do from right where you are, extend your REACH to the Muslim world:

1. Pray—find a missionary, a partnership, and join the fray, on your knees, for God to move and break through.
2. Go on a Vision Trip.
3. Reach out to Muslims around you. The vast majority of them are just like you, even though they may dress differently. They're concerned about paying off the car, saving for their kids' college, their next visit to the doctor. What they need is to see the love of Christ demonstrated to them through you, their neighbor.

Have you noticed in the Bible that sometimes God's values are very different than ours? We value life and peace more than almost anything. But sometimes God stirs things up and lets people suffer, and even die—so that His people will learn obedience to the heart of God. Before 9/11, no one here really seemed to care or even know about the Muslim world. We just wanted them to keep the oil coming and the price low. But this morning you have been very interested in what I had to say—primarily because of 9/11 and its aftermath. Is this perhaps the severe, sovereign hand of God? Saying to the American church, "You have ignored this great city of Nineveh for too long, so now I'm going to put them in your face so that you will think about them and begin to

care for them with my compassion?" And do whatever you can to bring them out of the terrible darkness they're in, into the beautiful light of the kingdom of His beloved Son, our Savior.

OUTLINE OF JONAH (ESV Study Bible):

- A. Jonah's commissioning and flight, 1:1-3
 - B. Jonah and the pagan sailors, 1:4-16
 - C. Jonah's grateful prayer, 1:17-2:10
- A'. Jonah's recommissioning and compliance, 3:1-3a
 - B'. Jonah and the pagan Ninevites, 3:3b-10
 - C'. Jonah's angry prayer, 4:1-4
- D. Jonah's lesson about compassion, 4:5-11