



Jonah

#4 “Before an election”

Sunday, November 6, 2016

Courage Church, Detroit, MI

I posted this on Facebook last week, so some of you may have seen the post, or maybe you saw it on your own... But, a most of you know, a few days ago, the Chicago Cubs won the world series...

and it was the first world series that they have won in over a century. They have, for as long as I can remember, been the laughing stock of Baseball because of all of the times that they were robbed of opportunities... and all the seasons that they just fell short.

But in 1993, there was this guy named Michael Lee, and he was graduating from High School in California... and sometimes in high school yearbooks, the seniors get to put a quote under their picture... and this was the quote that Michael Lee put under his yearbook picture:

“Chicago Cubs, 2016 World Series Champions. You heard it here first.”

That, my friends is a prophecy.

In the movie “back to the future 2”, they said that the Cubs would win the world series in 2015... we can safely call “Back to the Future” a false prophet (joking)... but this guy... man. It is pretty amazing that it actually lined up like that...

But Jonah, who is ACTUALLY a prophet... he doesn't really prophesy much in this book... and nothing at the level of Michael Lee...

but I said something a bit inaccurate in week one, and I apologize. I said that “there is not a single prophecy in the book of Jonah” and that is not quite true. There is, in the section that we are going to take on today... one very short word by Jonah that could certainly be deemed prophetic, which we will explore a bit today... but he says it so nonchalantly, and, truly, it is pretty bizarre what happens.

But for being a prophet, Jonah didn't prophesy much.

So just a very brief recap on what we have studied so far, before we get into the word of God...

God calls a prophet named Jonah to go to Nineveh, a great city, which was the capital of Assyria. But the Assyrians were enormous enemies of Israel... they were an empire that had invaded and done just *absolutely horrible* things to so many people... and Jonah did not want to go there, because he hated them for the pain that they had caused.

So instead he goes to a port called Joppa, and he boards a ship heading to Tarshish, which is a paradise basically as far in the other direction that he could go.

While he was on that boat, God sent a great storm... Jonah was thrown overboard from the ship when he told the sailors that he was the reason for the storm, and that throwing him overboard was the only way that the storm would cease...

and then after being thrown overboard, God appointed a great fish to swallow Jonah whole, and he lived in the belly of the fish for three days and three nights.

Then God commands the fish to throw up Jonah onto dry land. and from there God tells Jonah the same thing again... go to Nineveh.

and that is where we pick up this morning. If you would open your bibles with me to Jonah chapter 3, verse 1-5, and keep that pulled up but also turn to Matthew chapter 12:38-41.

Jonah Goes to Nineveh

3 Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time, saying, **2** **“Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it the message that I tell you.”** **3** **So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, three days’ journey in breadth.** **4** Jonah began to go into the city, going a day’s journey. And he called out, *“Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!”* **5** And the people of Nineveh believed God. They called for a fast and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them to the least of them.

Now, lets look once more at Matthew 12:38-41, we read this last week.

The sign of Jonah

38 Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered him, saying, “Teacher, we wish to see a sign from you.” **39** But he answered them, “An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. **40** For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. **41** The men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, something greater than Jonah is here.

Lets pray.

I want to point something out to you about what Jesus does in Matthew 12, and then we will get back to the book of Jonah. And I just caught this this week as I was studying this and reading it over and over.

The religious leaders ask Jesus for a sign, right?

They ask Jesus, “show us something miraculous, that will prove to us that you are the Messiah.”

now, granted, many of them must have seen several of the miracles that he had done, like the miracle he did for the man with the withered hand earlier in Matthew 12... but look at what Jesus said to them.

“There will be no signs.”

No wonders. Just the sign of Jonah.

What is Jesus doing? He is trying to emphasize to his hearers, that the Messiah was not going to come in all of the glory that they anticipated he would come in. He wasn't going to be crowned King on this earth. He wasn't going to take over Rome. He wasn't going to do this, the glamorous way. Jesus' way is, in the eyes of his hearers, a way of weakness.

Jesus says it this way in John's gospel, (John 12:32) -

“when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all people to myself.”

And what he is saying there, is that when the cross is raised... when Jesus is, by all our worldly standards, the weakest that he will ever be...

SURPRISE! that is when he will draw everyone to himself.

Paul says it like this in Philippians (2:7) - Jesus “emptied” himself by taking the form of a servant.

Because here is the truth, when you find yourself empty, the only thing left to do is fill the emptiness with something.

Take Jonah for example.

Jonah had everything. You can tell by the wording in chapter one... Jonah had means. He had money, he was a prophet of God... he was all set. He had the type of lifestyle to where he could charter a boat and take a trip that would have taken a years time to go on.

So he gets called to Nineveh, and instead he heads toward Tarshish... 2000 miles away on a boat with no motor.

He is a man who has options, and he chooses his own option.... and then suddenly finds himself in the belly of a fish....

with no more options.

Just life in a fish.

Then by the grace of God, the fish pukes him up, and God gives him the same commission that he gave Jonah when Jonah had it all...

go and preach to Nineveh!

Now, if you read closely, especially at chapter four which we will read in two weeks... Jonah's heart toward Nineveh has not changed.

He still despised the Ninevites.

The only difference is, now he is broken. He was at the bottom.

He is out of options.

He tried to do life in his own way and on his own strength, and it got him eaten by a fish. So this time, from a lowly place, he reluctantly obeys... and he goes to Nineveh.

and notice what the text says... Nineveh was a great city! It took three days for him to walk the city! That is just a massive place. And he is one man... he is not a King, he is not a governing official. He is not even an Assyrian.

He is an outsider, coming in to an evil, violent city from the lowest possible position, and look at what happens:

Jonah led the biggest city in the world to the Lord, completely on a strength that was NOT his own. Because he himself could never have done that. If you read it closely, he barely even tries, and we will get to that in a few minutes...

but it was when Jonah had nothing left, that he was able to be a part of changing EVERYTHING for this evil city.

Now, compare that to Jesus.

When the world expected the Messiah to come as a King, instead, he came as a servant.

and they asked him for a sign... because he says he is the King of the Jews... but this does not look like a King.

When he is at that final meal with the disciples, and he begins washing *their* feet, Peter says "No! Jesus I should be washing your feet"

But this King washes other people's feet.

When they are crucifying him, the crowd mocks him and says "if you are God, then call on your angels to save you..."

But this King does NOT call on an army of angels to save him.

This King lays down his life for his people.

Fast forward to the very end... to Revelation 5. When the apostle John writes, and he is looking for someone who is actually worthy to unroll the scroll and read it... and John says:

THERE IS NO ONE! Nobody in this world, is good enough. There is not one.

Remember this guys... Especially this week. No one on earth is good enough. No one has what it takes to save us... and John recognizes that in Revelation... he looks around and says, "it doesn't exist here."

so he weeps. and he weeps.

but then John looks up, and he sees a LION. The image of strength... the image that we think of when we think of what it takes to make a real impact on a city... to take over a city... to overcome a city.

A LION! So John says "weep no more."

Because the one who IS strong enough, now is here, among us... The one who IS WORTHY is here...

the lion... Jesus Christ... and He, and ONLY He, will open the scroll... and WE WILL BE REDEEMED. Because he has overcome death. He has overcome and destruction, He has overcome the cross and the grave... and he has come in *strength*.

But then something else happens.

It is almost as if John blinks.

it is like, he looks one way, and then he looks back... only when he looks a second time, he doesn't see a lion anymore.

This time, he sees a lamb.

and the bible says something strange about this lamb...

this lamb is *slaughtered*, but is standing tall.

Because what happened is, the lion, the only one strong enough... came *as a lamb*. The one who could bring about justice and destruction in one fall swoop instead came as a creature that couldn't bring harm if he tried... He could have stayed a lion. He had all the power to stay a lion... but instead he came, as a lamb for the slaughter.

and he let himself be broken. and it was in his brokenness that he saved us, from the absolute lowest position.

But this is *the opposite* of the way that we think in our world.

In our world, we think... “if this world is going to change, it is going to be changed by the people at the top. If we can reach the people at the top, we can change the world.”

But that is literally opposite of everything that the bible models for us.

Jesus took the lowest position. and he said things like “if you want to be first, then you have to be last.”

Aaron Long said it on Thursday when he was here... he was talking about the 50 of that us gathered in the sanctuary, worshipping Jesus in that moment, and he talked about how that is the way it all started in Acts... it was a few people rallying together around something that is good.

Something that they knew would actually change the world, when the governments and empires weren't going to.

It wasn't the powerful leaders and the Kings who “turned the world upside down” as we read about in Acts 17:6...

NO!

IT WAS THE POWERFUL ONES WHO SAID *THAT*, about Paul and Silas because they were freaking out that they had come to their towns...

because wherever Paul and Silas went, inevitably was changed... This underground, grass roots movement called Christianity was turning the world on its head.

and it left governments stunned and confused and unsure what to do about these “Christians” - these “followers of the way” who were changing everything, everywhere, without an ounce of authority from their

governments. How? Think about it, why do you think that they were called that... "people of the way"

Jesus says "I am the way the truth and the life.."

The early church was a group of people who said "we are going to live life, THE JESUS WAY!"

and it is a way of grace... and as this new way spread, it infiltrated culture from the bottom - up, to the point where the government was arresting the people spreading it because they saw it as such a great and ever-growing threat...

and though it started small before long it became something that could not be stopped.

and the persecution that was meant to silence the gospel ONLY ACCELERATED ITS SPREADING. it drew more attention to it...

because there were all these people who had something that they actually believed was worth being imprisoned for. Worth dying for. Worth being the last for. Paul wrote some of the most important letters in history from a prison because he was willing to serve Jesus at any cost. And that was the cost.

You think of the movements today that have started that way... that have started so small and with just a few people rallying around a cause they believe in, so much so that they are willing to be punished, jailed, or even hurt because of, and it spirals into something great... that is how change happens.

And that is what makes the church of Jesus Christ so powerful.

It is an agent of change no matter what climate our world is in at the moment.

ChaVonne, a few months ago took me aside and told me something prophetic that God had given her about our church... and it blessed me so

much. She said not to worry about growth... that growth would come... and its obvious that it *is* coming... but the word that God gave her was not to worry about growth... the word that He gave her was:

JUST WATCH WHAT I CAN DO WITH A FEW FAITHFUL PEOPLE.

and I am in so much awe of everything that God has done this year already, through a few faithful people in this place.

now, I say all that to say,

today marks the beginning of a big week for our nation.

This Tuesday is the presidential election.

and I am sure that you, like me, have read many articles and positions on the whole thing... I read one that talked about how “election anxiety is real.” How people are just absolutely so worried about what will happen on Tuesday.

and I know, at least for me, I am just looking forward to it being over.

Not only because it has been the largest charade of character assassination in the history of our society, but because of how much it has divided even the church.

It has been so divisive!

There are two very opposite sides of the spectrum here... and people on both sides are completely convinced that the only Christian thing to do is to vote for their candidate...

and what is even more scary to me, is that just about every Christian, including most Christian leaders, are saying things like “if we elect the wrong person, it is the end of our nation.” - OR, God forbid... “the end of religious liberties” - which, may or may not be true... I am not worried about it happening, but that doesn't mean that it won't happen. But according to the bible, it certainly would not be the first time...

but that doesn't scare me. I am not afraid of what it may look like to lose my rights... in fact, as a citizen of the Kingdom of Heaven, I laid down my rights a long time ago.

what scares me is that good, God fearing people are also saying:

that if we get the right person... that person will turn it all around.

and it begs the question, who do you actually think is on the throne?

I mean I have read article after article saying online about this... to the point of literally wanting to vomit...

Christians saying that if a pastor doesn't specifically endorse one side then they aren't speaking the truth, or that they have gotten soft...

Soft... we are talking about a religion that worships a God who describes himself as a LION that came as a slaughtered LAMB, and we are worried about being soft.

Jesus is the epitome of what it means to lay down your rights, and your strength, when he most certainly did not have to... but I would hardly call him soft.

and we live as if the Christians job has EVER been to try and change the government.

When King Darius signed the ordinance that said that nobody could pray to anyone but him for 30 days, or they would be thrown into the lions den... Daniel opened his window toward Jerusalem, got on his knees three times every day, and prayed to the one true God, basically saying BRING ON THE LIONS. (Daniel 6) - I am a citizen of a different Kingdom.

He didn't try to overthrow the king... He just continued serving the real King... but I would hardly call him soft.

Who was on the throne that day? I would hardly say Darius.

When Paul was put on trial in Acts 24, what did he do? He pointed to Jesus. He said, “the only thing that you have on me is that my King is NOT you. It is Jesus. If I am going to get charged for anything, then it is going to be for the way that I take pains to ensure that I have a clear conscience before God.”

Who was on the throne that day?

Or take Jesus.

How did Jesus respond when he stood before the government in his day? Because he certainly had the opportunity to speak against it, or to infiltrate it...

When he was face to face with Pilate, what did he say? He said “My Kingdom is not of this world.” (John 18:36) He says that IF it were *not* that way... THEN his servants would have fought to make sure that he was’t delivered over to the Jews. But they didn’t need to... because he is the King in a Kingdom far more powerful than even Rome.

He didn’t try to change the way the government acted, he said that his Kingdom was something different entirely.

His hope comes from an entirely different source. and until we, ourselves can learn to truly connect to that source, we are going to be disappointed, no matter how things in society appear to turn out. Half of you will be disappointed on Tuesday... and the other half will be let down not long after, when your candidate doesn’t turn out to be the savior that you had thought they would be. And the reason is simple:

Psalm 118:9 says “It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to trust in princes.”

Jeremiah (17:5) puts it this way, and it is so much more brutal... He says “CURSED is the man who trusts in man. and makes flesh his strength.”

and where I will NEVER tell you that your voice does not matter or that you should not take part in things like elections... I will gladly tell you all day long that you need not worry about it or be anxious about it because the God that I serve will still be sitting on His throne on Wednesday, no matter who wins on Tuesday.

and When I see pastors, and leaders, and Christians using the name of Jesus while they are depleting their entire platform for the sake of making a *political* change, I get sad. Because it is a reflection of a misguided idea that the world is going to be changed from the top/down. and that is the opposite of the gospel.

It is putting your trust in man.

and it is going to leave a lot of people devastated when it ultimately lets them down.

Let me say it this way... and I am sure some people will disagree with me, and that is ok. But if you don't have reconciliation, which is the ministry we have all been given... if we don't have reconciliation, then the legislation does no good. We are, according to 2 Corinthians 5, supposed to reconcile people back to God, not counting their trespasses against them... and it is there, at the point of reconciliation, that a person would ever be able to take to heart the words that Jesus said to the woman caught in the act of adultery... "Go, and sin no more."

The law said one thing... it said "stone her."

but grace said another. and the job of the church is not to shine lights on the problems, the job of the church is to shine the light that is the solution, and that is Jesus and ONLY Jesus.

I have heard it so many times right now... "our world has turned its back on the bible... We call good evil, and evil good." and I get it! I have read Isaiah 5, I see what everyone else sees, and I agree, society is heading more and more toward godlessness. But what Christians don't seem to grasping in this particular time, is that we *also* stray from the bible if we think for even a moment that legislation is the answer to that. Jesus is the answer. The

church is the answer. God's people illuminating grace in the darkest places
IS THE ANSWER.

One of the most memorable sermons that I have ever heard, was given by one of my pastors, Pastor Matthew Barnett. And I BELIEVE, and I could be off a week or two on the date... but I believe that it was this same Sunday, 8 years ago... the Sunday right before the election between Barack Obama and John McCain.

and the number that Pastor Matthew kept using was 80 million dollars... I believe that the candidates that year, between the two of them, spent around a billion dollars... this year the number is double. But Pastor Matthew used the number 80 million, because over the last 20 years leading up to that moment, that is what had come in to the LA Dream Center.

and what he was comparing was the amount of money that people gave to their respective candidates... the amount that was spent on the campaigns to determine who would become our next president...

and he showed all the ways that millions and millions of dollars by each campaign essentially went into the character assassination of the other person, while building up of themselves. More money then most people will ever see, all going toward tearing apart another person... which really is devastating when you consider the state of our world. Even our nation.

and then Pastor Matthew started sharing stories of what the LA Dream Center did with the 80 million dollars that came in to their organization over the last 20 years.

And he told stories of women rescued from human trafficking... when the dream center would take a van out every Saturday night, and look for prostitutes... and when they found one they would walk up to her, and hand her a rose, and tell her that she is loved, and let her know that if she wants to change her life, a van will be by in a few minutes to pick her up, and if you choose to get in, the Dream Center will protect you.

and he told stories of thousands of drug addicts coming off the streets and into recovery programs, many of which now were serving on his PASTORAL STAFF...

and he told stories of floors being renovated in the old hospital that they bought and were restoring... and all the lives that have come through there... that have lived on that campus, that have been touched by the campus. The amount of people fed in the food ministries, helped by their medical trucks, housed when they had nowhere to go...

and the numbers were staggering.

and as I thought about what that place has grown into... it is now a fully restored 400,000 square foot hospital that is filled to capacity with every type of ministry you could imagine, I couldn't help but think back to their beginnings.

With Pastor Matthew arriving in Los Angeles, as 20 year old kid, no clue what he was going to do to reach the second largest city in the entire nation... just knowing that God had called him there.

Yet God opened door after door after door. And the broken community that they planted that hospital in is now considered one of the most livable communities in our nation. and it wasn't because of government programs or because of laws that were passed.

It was because a small group of people came together and said "something has to change in this city, and how on earth can I expect anything to change if I am not willing to be the one who changes it?"

So knowing that in their own strength they could never make a dent, they stepped out anyway... because God told them too.

and God is no respecter of persons. And what he did in Los Angeles, he can do in Detroit.

What he did in Nineveh, he can do in Detroit. No matter who wins the election, no matter how far gone our city and our nation may seem to have gone.

and people can tell me all day long “yeah but.” “yeah but.” “yeah but.”

and show me all the ways that this time is different... this election is different, these circumstances are different...

but is different? Is it different from Rome? Is it different from Germany? Is it different from Assyria?

Let me explain something to you.

Nineveh was the capital of Assyria. And this may sound absolutely horrible, because it is... but the Assyrian empire was the most brutal empire as it gets. A simple google search would show you all that you need to know... they did awful things, like skinning entire families alive, to make an example of ONE member of their family that defied the empire. They were masters of siege warfare, which means that they would surround cities and take them over entirely.

The old testament books of Isaiah, Chronicles, and 2 Kings (15 & 18) all record examples of the Assyrians invading and bringing harm on people.

There were worse things going on there, then, than we could ever even imagine here in America. and look at what God did there:

Nineveh was 3 days breadth in size... so no army would have enough men to surround a city like that. This city would have been, in that day, basically impossible to overtake. The Assyrians own methods of siege warfare would not have worked on their great city. But God has different methods, doesn't he?

God tells Jonah to go preach in Nineveh, so Jonah goes and he preaches a 5 worded sermon. It is as close to a prophecy as we get in the entire book.

In Hebrew, which is the original language that the book of Jonah was written in, it was a five word long sermon.

In English, it is eight:

“Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!”

That is it. Read that closely. Think about that.

Jonah came in with hell, fire and brimstone and not an *ounce* of grace. Look at the passage... Jonah doesn't even tell Nineveh to repent. He just tells them they are doomed. There is no “if my people who are called by my name will humble themselves...”

no!

Just five Hebrew words of hopelessness toward a group of people that Jonah didn't even want to see repent, was all that God needed to bring Nineveh back to him. The darkest, cruelest empire in the world.

Because God does not work within our boundaries. He can do anything, and He will do anything that it takes to reconcile people back to him. God does not conquer through armies, he conquers through grace.

and if we believe the bible to be truth, and we look at history along side of it... then what are you afraid of?

God brought that entire city to its knees through one prophet who didn't even want to see it changed, because God did want it see it change.

It is like when Moses asks God, and says “What do I tell Israel when they ask me your name?... what does God say that his name is?

“I am who I am.”

He is saying “You aren't going to understand me, because I work within my own rules. I have my own Kingdom.”

“I am not bound by voting booths or ballots. I am not bound by walls or borders.”

“I am not even bound by Christians who make me look like all these things that I am *not*, because even though they say that God is in control, they spend most of their time worrying about who we are going to say is in control. “

God is in control.

He told Jonah what to do in chapter one... Jonah tried to take control... He tried to run... until Jonah realized, “you can’t run from God for very long.” Then God told Jonah what to do again in chapter three, and it was the exact same thing.

He is always the constant. He knew what he wanted, and He got it!

Hebrews puts it this way, “Jesus Christ is the same, yesterday, today, and forever.”

“I am who I am.”

“And I sit on the throne of the universe, and I want to sit on the throne of your heart. No matter what the world does... it may turn... it may get darker...”

But the darker the room, the brighter the light feels when you turn it on.

and we are called to be a light in these dark times.

guys, I have never seen fear packaged so strategically, and work so well on the people who are supposed to be hope through these dark times.

and I am telling you, fear puts out lights.

1 John tells us, fear has to do with punishment. The Greek word is “*Kolasis*” and it means torment, or penalty.

“Fear has to do with torment.”

It is the idea that, if things go the way that you don't think that they should, then it is over. and it is no way to live.

but what does Hebrews tell us? Live like this: (Hebrews 12:2)

To look to Jesus, the author and the finisher of our faith.

There is no reason to fear, if you are looking to the one who is the beginning, and is the end. and is everything in the middle.

Who for the joy set before him, endured the cross, despised the shame on our behalf, and is now seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

He conquered, by laying down his life. He conquered, by grace.

when you put your hope in a worldly system you will be let down by it, but the cross of Jesus Christ will never let you down.

David puts it this way in Psalms, he says “the wicked have fitted their arrow to the string, to shoot in the dark at the upright in heart;”

The wicked take advantage of people when the lights are out. The lights go out, they take their shot. They shoot from the shadows. They get you when you aren't looking.

and then David says “what can the righteous do? When the foundation of law and of order collapse?” (NLT)

And this is so powerful... this is Psalm 11:4... he just says simply:

well, IF that happens, *whatever*... (it doesn't quite say that, but it basically says that...) because The Lord's throne is in heaven... and he is still sitting on it. And he will continue to sit on it.

No matter what happens here.

Trials will come and they will go, but the reason that God gave us the book of Revelation was so that we would know from the beginning... that in the end, God still will be on his throne.

In the end... We win.

God is a whole lot bigger than presidents, or kings... he is bigger than armies and empires.

and he has commissioned his church, from the beginning, to be the hope of the world, because he knew from the beginning that governments would always let us down.

So he created something greater, and it is called the church.

So may we step up this season, and say “no matter what happens... We are going to be a part of the change, by the way that we live our lives... by the way that we take care of the poor, and the widow, and the stranger, and the least of these.. and by the way that we take care of EACH OTHER.”

By the way that we live broken... laying down our strength, remembering that it is the meek who will inherit the earth. Not Rome with their weapons and armies, not Assyria with their invasions. Not Republicans or Democrats.

Every great Empire throughout history, eventually collapsed. But the church of Jesus Christ is still standing.

Presidents, have come and gone...

The Lord still sits on His throne.

and may He still sit on the throne of your heart, as you navigate our broken world this week, and prayerfully make decisions based on your convictions, on the principles in the bible, and the Holy Spirit's voice in your life.

But may you never forget who is really in charge.