

Jonah's Conclusion

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 30 June 2024

Preacher: James Tang

[0:00] So yeah, kids happy to stay here. And if you find me boring, you should you should go if! There's a TV in the back that you can, you can watch as well. But my kids Christina and the kids, she took all three of them and went on a plane back to the UK herself on Wednesday night. So I'm actually alone for these next few weeks. So I'm accepting bookings for evening dinner. If anyone feels as though it feels compelled to treat their pasta to dinner and save me from my McDonald's.

Then you are more than welcome to invite me. Family, of course, as my family have not been around, I'm encouraged by the fact that we have a family here. There's something that's been on my heart, maybe even before I jump into this message is there are really exciting things happening. I mean, wine tasting is pretty exciting. And I gotta tell you, Kenneth coming up with a curriculum that has a has an exam and the price at the end. This is this is serious stuff. And of course, maybe the biggest thing that's been on my heart is we have so many exciting things happening. But we also have so many sad things happening. You know, Nathan came up and said, thank you, Nathan, for showing us that if you can serve as lead that anyone can serve as lead. Making it accessible for all of us. Thank you for your! I love you, Nathan. It's been a while, actually, since I've come there.

Anyway,

I've completely lost my train of thought now. Yeah, and I know he's actually to his credit, he came and just shared that actually, there's just a gratitude that we should have. But I've always thought that actually gratitude and grief are held hand in hand. As there are good things happening, there are also bad things happening. As there are gains, there are losses. And so just just being mindful of that. And even as a leadership last night, we were praying for all the struggles that we've we're going through as a community, too. I know that each of you have different challenges and struggles. And I don't want to just be neglecting that and just going, oh, everyone's great, happy, high five this, we enjoy service and all this, but actually neglecting to know that actually, each of us have our own challenges and our own struggles. And as a community, how we'll be measured by, at least how I think we'll be measured by, is just how we love each other through those moments. And so just, if you are someone who's struggling through something like that, and you're holding gratitude, but you also have grief. If you are excited about some things, and you are anxious and worried and angry about other things, you're not alone. You're not alone. And you are part of this family. We want you to be part of this family that you can feel as though you can have a place to actually share about these things. We've been going through the book of Jonah, and we see all these things happening. Last week, we saw Jonah, this is the last week in Jonah, by the way, and we saw Jonah just be just excited, elated about our plan, but then completely devastated that his enemy country was now being spared of destruction. And so you see him just kind of going back and forth. And through this whole series of Jonah, I hope one of the things that you've been able to experience is the fact that, oh, there's Jonah in me. There's Jonah in me. There's self-righteousness in me. There's idols in me that I got to get rid of, because if I don't, they'll destroy me. And that's why God in his love is actually showing those things out and saying, hey, these are the things that you're holding on to that are not me and that they will destroy you. And so we see that, and we've seen that in the whole of this book. We started off with, do you want to hear from the voice of God? Do you actually want to hear God's voice? And a first thought, we're like, yeah, of course we do. But then are we really prepared to hear what God's voice is? And then the storm that comes when we choose to go away from, run away from his will. And then you see, God is just completely in control in every way.

And even though Jonah is self-righteous, even though he is prideful, even though he is a narcissistic nationalist, God is patient with him to the point where he doesn't let him drown in the storm. He actually appoints a fish. He appoints a plant. He appoints a worm. God is just in control.

And as we go through that, we realize that it's not even just about Jonah. It's not about the Jonah in us. And last week, Sam shared with us that actually it's about Jesus. That all of this really culminates in one thing and one person, and that is Jesus. And so for us, we've been looking at that.

[4:28] I mean, that song, that song that we sang there, Waymaker, that actually that is who you are. You know, you're the promise keeper. You're the Waymaker. You have a light in the darkness.

And you realize that actually it's never been about us. It's never even just been about the Jonah in us. It's not even about Jonah. It's definitely not about the fish, but it's about Jesus. Does your life align with that cornerstone that is Jesus? And that's really what it's about. And we've been going through this book of Jonah and we've been seeing that God's saying, hey, you have idols.

You are self-righteous. You are worried about things that won't last, but I am gracious. I am merciful. I am slow to anger. I am abounding in love. I am relenting from disaster. And so we find out a little bit about God. And for me, all of this, the source of all this is really one thing.

I mistrust in God's goodness. Think about the sin that you have in your life. And I'm pointing at you. I'm pointing at me because there's sin in your life. There's sin in my life. If you think about the source of it, it is what Jonah is showing here, that he has a deep mistrust of God's goodness.

More importantly, maybe more specifically, he has a deep mistrust of God's goodness for him.

Think about when you sin. Think about when you choose to take things into your own hands. What you're saying is, God, I'm not sure you have my best interests at heart. I'm not sure that you know what's best for me. And I'm not sure you're going to give me what's best for me. So I'm going to do an Adam and Eve, and I'm going to take that myself. That's essentially every time we sin, every time we worry, that's what we're worrying about. We're mistrusting in God's goodness. And honestly, this hits me just as much as it should hit you. And actually it was my brother that shared the quote with me from Eugene Peterson, who was talking about Jonah. It is, it is very possible to have a religious career without having to deal with God. It is very possible to have a religious career that Jonah has without having to deal with God. So that's for, as pastors, and actually week in, week out, we're hearing leaders of the church falling for different reasons. We see week in, week out, people working in churches, working in ministry, who actually don't have to deal with God. If you, if you want to, you can actually switch that side of you off. For me, that's not what I want. It's very possible to have a religious career without having to deal with God. It's very possible to turn up to church week in, week out, and not having to do anything outside that changes the world. You can be of complete heavenly minded, but of no earthly good. It's very possible to turn up to church week in, week out, without letting God change you. It's very possible to listen to sermons week in, week out, and actually not apply them to your life at all. Have you applied this series of Jonah to your life?

[7:22] As you look at this and you go, where is the Jonah in me? Who is God in all of this? How have you applied any of this? And that's the question I really want to ask as we summarize and as we conclude. And there's a couple of things that I really want to bring out. The first thing is this, God is in complete control. You look at this story from the beginning, when voice of God comes and says, Hey, go into enemy territory to preach the gospel. It's God is in control. He's in control of all missionary activity. Where does the storm come from? It comes from God. And God puts storms in our lives to actually highlight to us some of the problems that we have. Because we realize that actually, when those things are taken away from us, we have the highlight of money. If money is your idol, and then suddenly the economy goes down, that's, there's a storm in your life, but actually that's, a storm that God is going to use to show you that actually that is your idol. And the idol will at some point crush you. If your idol is relationship, if your idol is a person, then when that person is taken away from you, you are crushed. And God's using that to kind of go, Hey, look, don't idolize that. Don't hold onto that. And Job was the one that said, God, God gives and he takes away. Why?

Because he's trying to form us. He's trying to show us there are things that we're holding onto that we shouldn't. And he's so in control that he appoints a great fish to come and swallow up Jonah for three days and three nights rent free. And then he's so in control after three days, what's this end of chapter two? And the Lord spoke to the fish and it vomited Jonah out upon the dry land. That's one of my biggest life goals that I can talk to animals like lions. Wouldn't that be cool just to be able to just say, Hey, Aslan, Hey, like Mufasa, Mufasa is not around anymore. May he rest in peace.

Wouldn't that be cool? And God speaks to the fish and say, does his self-righteousness revile you? Yeah, me too. Throw him up, throw him out and take him back to the place where he first started running from me. And then let's start again. He's in control of everything. And then Jonah does his

act, causes a huge revival, leaves the city and sulks and wants to die. And then God appoints a plant, a nice big plant to cover in the shade. Wouldn't we like that in this kind of like hot weather now, just to have a shit, well, actually, no, the humidity will kill you anyway, but there's, but having a plant to cover and then God's like, I will look after you. But then he appoints a worm to take away the plant because I don't, I don't want you just to be comfortable. I want you to know me.

I want you to know my heart. I want you to know that the grace that I'm showing the Ninevites is the same grace I'm showing to you. And you're actually just being a jerk. And I'm showing you that. And then he appoints the wind. And then finally he speaks. God is in control.

How often do you really appreciate that? That God is in control of your life? Like, honestly, for real. We say, Oh God is in control. It's okay. I didn't get that job. It's okay. God is in control.

[10:20] Oh, Oh, it's my holiday next week, but it's raining there. God is in control. It'll be okay. Like we say it, right? But do we actually mean it? Do we actually believe man, God, you truly are sovereign. You speak to the wind and to the waves and to the animals, to everyone, to everything. God's in control of your life. Have a, have a think about something in your life that you're not in control of right now. Do you believe that God is in control?

Especially the storms, especially the grief, especially the losses. What if God was actually in control? How does that change the way you deal with that issue?

If someone doesn't like you, if someone's causing you grief and is attacking you and speaking behind your back and doing all the evil things, and actually all you want to do is just fight back, stab back, do all these things. But if God is in control, the most powerful force in the universe is sat right next to you and is in control. Psalm 23, and you prepare a table for me in the presence of my enemies. You're not afraid of my enemies. You just like say, come sit. How does that change how you deal with your circumstances? When you're worried whether you're going to get this career jump or this or this or this relationship, but knowing that God is in control, how does that actually change the way you live? That's my question. That's my question for me. I'm asking myself, how can I act as though and believe what I actually say I believe, which is that God is truly sovereign? What does that actually mean? It means that I'm not phased by a lot of the things that happen around the circumstances around me, because I'm like, actually, God, you're in control. More importantly, you're not just in control and you're a bad guy. You're good and you love me and you have my best interests at heart. Do you have that in you? Is that something that you remind yourself of, the sovereignty of God? I think that's something that, let's say, even doing devotionals. We hear that, right? If you've grown up in the church, you've heard about doing devotionals. What is doing devotionals? It's spending time just in solitude with God, reminding yourself how small you are and how big he is. And I don't know about you, but when I'm reminded of how small I am and how big he is, I have comfort. Julian's laughing because he wants to have a small joke there.

We're better than that, Julian. We're all small and God is that big. He's in control. I want you just to pause just for a second and just think, what does that actually mean? As he's shown, even through these four chapters, that he is in absolute, complete control of every single thing. How does that free you? How should, how should that free you?

[13:08] Because it should. And why is he doing all of it? What's he actually trying to do? If he's in control, what's his objective? I'd say two things and two Christian words I'm going to throw at you. One is salvation. The other is sanctification. Salvation. Let me start with that word.

Jude, I want to pick on you. What does salvation mean to you? What does that word mean? Being taken out of a really bad place into a really good place, having bad news, and then having the good news come. Brilliant. You're drowning and then you get saved. That's the nature of the gospel.

That's what this is all about. Keller says this, that we are, it's, we are far worse than we ever imagined, but far more loved than we ever dream. That we are drowning, that we are dead in our sins, as it says in Ephesians 2. And he's doing all this, he's orchestrating all this so that he can save us. So that we can actually be, from being blind, that we can now see. From being lost, we can now be found. That's, that's, that's the first thing. To change your life around completely, because where you were going on your own was destruction. Where you were going on your own was not a good place, but God turns it around. Salvation. The second is sanctification. What does sanctification mean?

Just going to leave everyone on edge here just a little bit before I ask Paul. Paul, what's, what's the sanctification to you? Man, being made whole, being made pure. It's his process of growing, of getting to be more like him.

I can imagine a conversation that I'm going to have with God when I finally meet him. And we're going to sit and we're going to look through my life. And I'm going to be just like, man, God, if you hadn't done that, I wouldn't be there. If you hadn't taken that away from me, that girl that was poison, then I wouldn't have met Christina. If I, if you didn't reject me in this, let me suffer rejection in this, I wouldn't have gotten this. If I didn't go through this challenge, I wouldn't be the person that I am now. And you, you look back at your life. Don't you have all those moments? If you didn't let me slip there, Lord, and now out of love, and then catch me, I wouldn't be where I am today. And I think we'll get to heaven and we'll see all of these things.

And we realize that everything, the people that don't like us, the bosses that mistreat us, all the challenges that we face, God used for our sanctification. God used what the enemy means for evil. God turns for good and actually uses those things. So every time something bad happens to me, and this happened literally within seconds of me, let's say having my trivial injury was, man, God, you're going to do something in me again. I'm going to learn something from this again, and it's going to be good. And I'm not going to regret it. I'm not going to exchange that experience for anything else. I think you have one of those moments too. I think you are facing those things right now that you, if you could choose, you'd be like, God, can you just spare me of that?

[16:02] Can you just not let me have this kind of challenge? But that's the nature of life that it's through going to the gym and facing resistance is when we start to get strong.

I went to the gym for the first time in many, many months, uh, the other day. And usually my, my gym sessions last for about 15 minutes because after 15 minutes, I start thinking to myself, I shouldn't, my back hurts a little bit. Maybe I shouldn't work out. Actually, I'm a little bit hungry. I'm a little bit tired. Oh, I was like, I really shouldn't get so muscly. You know, I'll be a stumbling block to so many people if I do this, you know? So then I talk myself out of it and I, and I leave the gym within 15 minutes and then jump straight into the jacuzzi because that's better. Uh, but it's only in the gym that you get stronger. It's only in the gym where you get more toned. Life is the gym. Life is literally the gym. And God throws all these different things at you to help grow you. Do you believe that? Do you acknowledge that? Because I think the first step to actually getting that growth is now God's going to grow you anyway, whether you know it or not, when you, whether you realize it or not, but the sooner we realize that the more we embrace it, the more we embrace it, the more we lean into it. So what tensions do you face in your life that you're like, you know what, God, I think you've placed that tension there for me to learn something.

You've placed, you've placed that really annoying person in my life so that I can learn something so that I can grow so that I can at the very least grow in patience. When you ask God, can you help me be a more patient person? What's he going to do?

Is he just going to give you the gift of patience or is he going to give you someone so you can grow in your patience? I see husbands looking at wives and girlfriends looking at boyfriends here. When you ask God for more faith, what's he going to do? Is he going to give you more faith or is he going to give you opportunities so you can exercise that faith so you can learn how to trust him?

You see, God is in control of everything here. And the second point is this, and this is my main point today is God loves the city. You see, at the end of chapter four, I'm going to read it to you.

[18:06] So he goes, this goes, actually at the beginning, chapter one and chapter three, it says, arise, go to Nineveh, that great city. God loves cities. My thought today was, as I look at these four chapters, I look at this book, I'm like, what does a Jewish prophet going into a pagan city have to do with me all these years later here in Hong Kong? What does the story of Jonah have to do with you as you live in this city? One of the first things Reuben said when he got back to England was, man, fresh air and space, right? The definition of a city is that we don't have space. And in Hong Kong, we don't have air, not air that we can use to breathe, especially in this humidity in these few months. And I joked last week that my experience of God, when he challenged me, that the most beautiful people, part of that picture in, with all the georocks was the corner of those annoying people who were disturbing my picture. But those people in that corner, they bear the image of God.

So per square inch, the most beautiful place is Causeway Bay, because that's where there are the most examples of the image of God. People. The city. But the city is hard. The city is exciting. You're all here because, maybe you're here because the city has most career opportunities. The city has most potential high earning power. The city has the most possibility for you to just to meet people. All these exciting things. But there's so many dark spots in every single city.

There's so many examples of brokenness in cities. And I want to talk a little bit about cities today, because it's interesting. After Jonah preaches his message, which is in 40 days, you're going to die. And then they repent. Now, as a pastor at that point, I'd be like, okay, I will teach you how to follow the ways of God, to be a righteous, holy people. But he doesn't, he leaves and chapter four, verse five, it says this, Jonah went out of the city and sat to the east of the city and made a booth for himself there. He sat under it in the shade till he should see what would become of the city. Can you imagine that? He does this great revival. And he's like, that's it. You're all on your own. I'm leaving. And he doesn't go home. He sits outside of the city, finds a nice spot, puts a few cushions in place, has a little booth, and then wants to look, grabs his popcorn. Cause he's like, I still want God to destroy you guys. So I'm going to watch you burn because the journey to repentance is a long one and you're going to fail. I'm going to watch you all die. And that's why I'm there. He doesn't have a love for the city, especially not this city. And actually plenty of people don't like the city life. And yet here I'm assuming I'm preaching to the choir that we do like Hong Kong. We do like what this city brings. This story of Jonah, how do you apply it to your place here in Hong Kong right now in this city? God's saying, you cared for a plant. I want you to care for the planet. You cared for your garden, but I want you to care for the city. Now it's interesting because at the beginning of the Bible, you see Adam and Eve walking in the most beautiful garden. And there's this lovely picture that I sometimes think, man, that's where it's going to end up again. Us just walking with God in this calm garden. But the truth is, that's not the case. If you fly right to the end of the Bible in Revelation 21, you see that it's actually not a garden that we're ending up. It's what? It's a city. So it's interesting. So the beginning was a garden, but it was, the plan was never for it to stay as a garden where it was calm and tranquil. The goal was for all of us to get to a place where we could help be part of building this city, this Revelation 21 city, which I'm going to read a little bit to you. And it says, a city, of course, chapter 21, the famous part is, behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. [22 : 24] He will dwell with them and they will be with his people. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes and death shall be no more. Neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore for the former things have passed away. All things that we see in the city and he will make all things new.

And there will be a new Jerusalem showed me the holy city, Jerusalem coming down out of heaven, having the glory of God, its radiance, like a most rare jewel, like a Jasper clear as crystal. It had a great high wall with 12 gates and the gates, 12 angels. And on the gates, the names of the 12 tribes of the sons of Israel, there's just this beautiful picture that we see that the garden is supposed to turn into. How do we get from the garden to the city? It requires us people who have been made in the image of God to fulfill the cultural mandate that we've been given.

You see in Genesis 1, 20, 60, man was made in his image and we have dominion over creation. And we're supposed to reorder the raw elements of chaos like God did and order them into beauty. So they would reflect his glory. That's the whole point. What's education is taking the raw elements of knowledge and rearranging them into a systematic way where people can learn. What's, what's the, what's, what's entertainment? What's, what's film? It's taking the raw elements of human experience and rearranging them so that a story, a beautiful story can be told. What's the, what's the purpose?

What's the mandate of finance? You taking the raw elements of human resources and reordering them to a place where actually people can flourish and people can thrive. What is medicine? It's taking the raw elements of human biology and physiology and reordering them back into health. We're supposed to take whatever raw elements we've been given in whatever industry we've been given in whatever social circles we've been given and reorder them on God's behalf with God's help so that they will reflect him to the point where it will go from a garden and build into a city. Are we doing that?

Are you doing that? That's one of the biggest things that we really have to think about because actually on the whole, what we see is cities get a pretty bad rep. Sodom and Gomorrah is not a good city. We see cities are the place, the melting pot for all disease and all brokenness and all corruption.

[24 : 45] And in Hong Kong, we see those things. We are in an incredibly nice place here as we look across the harbor and we see all this beauty, but you know, as well as I do, it doesn't even, we don't even need to cross the harbor to see brokenness. There is brokenness within a few minutes of us walking around here.

How much are we actually aware of that? Or are we actually doing what Jonah has done and set up a nice little booth where we feel protected, where we can do our own thing, but then actually the people outside are still burning and the people outside are still broken and they are still hurting. Have you set up your nice little booth, your nice little bubble of your little community? Because even though you say, oh, actually I care for those outside by our actions, we're not. We've set up a little booth, just like Jonah. We don't care for the city in the way God cares for the city. Augustine, St. Augustine said, earthly cities glory in itself, whereas heavenly city glories in the Lord.

Can we be part of a cultural mandate that actually rearranges raw chaos in whatever things that we've been interested with and to rearrange them to the point there is order, there is beauty, there reflects the glory of God.

[26:00] That is the point I think that God is wanting us to do when it comes to the city. It's funny, he finishes with Jonah saying, you're crying about a plant, but can you not see the people?

Do you hear what I'm saying? You're crying about a plant. You're crying about something in your life that is so small, a comfort, a luxury that you have. Can you not see the people?

Does your heart not break for the people? I think in Hong Kong, we have this special opportunity where we look and we see all the kinds of poverty that exists.

It's not even just one type of poverty. It's every type of poverty that exists, whether it is financial, whether it is emotional, whether it is familial, all these things. Do you have compassion?

I shared last year when we were a much smaller group. There was one day I was walking through Central and Hong Kong stations. Do you know that really long walk that you have to do between the two that you always miscalculate, which is why you're always late for different things.

[27:02] I was just stood in the middle where there was just this pathway with these huge adverts of HSBC was there and people walking. And it was on a morning where it was just flooded.

Literally, it was the Penguin March. And there was a moment I was just coming in from exit C from Hong Kong station, wherever it is. I was looking down and just in that moment, my heart just completely imploded on itself.

And I just burst into tears because I saw all these scores of people going from home to work just on this Penguin March.

From what I know, lacking hope, lacking joy, lacking purpose, filled with anger, filled with frustration. You break open every single individual story. There will be a painful story about a family member.

There will be a painful story about a relationship. And I was like, man, God.

[28:04] My heart just breaks. There are people who are living this life who are straining, stressing, striving for the work that they think they need to get the money that they need, to get the power that they need, to get the status that they need, so that they think at that point they will be happy.

And they find out. So many find out. Or so many don't find out. And they keep going. But even those who do, you see the brokenness. You see the pain. And just before you think, oh, well, actually, I don't get to see that that much.

I'm not really surrounded by that. The next question is, well, why not? Because it exists. Or are the suicide rates that you see in a newspaper literally just a title that you see and it doesn't go into your head at all?

It's just something that you read or you hear and then you just let it go. But these are real people. We're brokenness. God's going to Jonah. Can you not see that you're worrying about your plant, but I'm worrying about my children?

Do we have that heart? Do we recognize the opportunity that we have in this city for what we can actually do? You can actually see if you look at this book, especially the New Testament, you look at the book of Acts. How did the church grow?

[29:20] To outgrow the Roman Empire. Yeah. The Christians at that time went into the cities, went to Antioch, went to Ephesus, went to Rome because they knew that's where the action was.

Most importantly, that's where the people were. And that's the most important thing. And I'll tell you this. If Christina had her way, her dream would be to live in a nice white cottage somewhere, possibly without Wi-Fi because she doesn't really need Wi-Fi.

And she would be there and just painting and enjoying the horses. And that's what she would do.

But why has she chosen to be here? She's chosen to be here because she knows this is what God

cares about the most. People.

Even ugly people are beautiful to him. Can you get that in your mind? Even ugly people are beautiful to God. Even annoying people are worth loving.

But maybe I'm asking too much. Maybe you don't understand that because actually you feel you are that unworthy person. You are that ugly person that isn't loved.

[30:21] And because of that, then you don't really want to love those other people. So I'm here to tell you, God is gracious and merciful. God is slow to anger and his love for you, his steadfast, unconditional, covenantal love for you is abounding and never changing, never ending.

And if you can understand that, then maybe you'll have the compassion that Jonah, that God is trying to foster out of Jonah, which is love the people. Don't just love the plants.

And love the cows. Love the cattle. Love his creation. Do we have that kind of love? Because now we're not Antioch.

We're not Ephesus. We're not Rome. But we are Hong Kong. We are London. We are New York. We are Sydney. And actually, people are flooding into the cities. We are in a place where there are tons of different ethnicities and cultures all in the same melting pot.

What are we doing here? Al Mohler, the president of one of the seminaries in America, said this.

This much is clear. The cities are where the people are. In the course of less than 300 years, our world will have shifted from one in which only 3% of people live in cities to one in which 80% are residing in urban areas.

[31:44] If the Christian church does not learn new modes of urban ministry, we will find ourselves on the outside looking in. The gospel of Jesus Christ must call a new generation committed Christians into these teeming cities.

As these new numbers make clear, there really is no choice. There really is no choice. You see in America, you see all these churches that are out in the suburbs, these enormous mega churches that are out in the suburbs when everyone is actually flooding into the city.

Now, if the church just stays in the countryside and just stays in the suburbs, we are really of no good to anyone. Because we also know, and Tim Keller says this, that as a city goes, so goes the culture.

As a city goes, so goes the culture. Have you thought about that? If you're wondering, why did God place me in Hong Kong? Why did God move me to Hong Kong? Well, it's because this is one of the most strategic places where you can actually share the gospel.

It is in one side, one of the hardest places. I get it because the city is all about itself. It's all about people achieving their own ambitions and their own goals, suffocated by the demands that places that a city places on you.

[32:45] But on the other hand, there is no better place where you can meet more people, where you can actually share the gospel more. Why has God placed you in Hong Kong? Have a think about that.

Why has God placed you here in this city at this time? What are you supposed to do? What's your cultural mandate?

Whether you're in retail, whether you're in healthcare, whether you're in law, what are you supposed to do for the city? Because the city is where it's at.

Why is the city so important? There's another book called First Urban Christians by a guy called Wayne Meeks, and he comes up with a couple of different things. The first reason why a city is so important is because there is a cultural element to this that you can form culture much quicker.

If you're in a village, he says, you can maybe bring one lawyer to Christ or maybe even two. But in a city, you can have influence that goes into so many more places.

[33:48] You can have an influence that goes into publishing, into schools, into institutions. You can change the whole legal profession in the city, whereas in the village, you cannot.

You can make movement in the city that changes the culture for good. Where do even those biggest educational institutions come from? Harvard, Yale. And of course, a lot of them have lost their way.

But I think it started with Harvard. It was started as a Christian school. If you read the book that actually Joe's boss wrote, Mission Drift, it talks about Harvard being a Christian school that started. But over time, it just drifted off.

And it's funny. There's a group of people in that school who were like, hey, we're mission drifting. This is not what Harvard was started by. And so they came out and they started another school. They're like, we're going to stick to the basics and stick to the principles again. And so they started another school and then called it Yale. And then it drifted off. Isn't that interesting that we as humans, we just have this propensity.

[34 : 45] We have this knack to start something with good intentions and then drift off. Do you remember a call that God has placed on your life? Maybe recently or maybe a long time ago.

Maybe it was come to Hong Kong. Maybe it was go to this workplace. Do you remember that time when you were praying to God for that job that you've got right now? God, please give me that job because with that job, I will glorify you.

And then six months in, that job has consumed you. And now you're complaining about that job.

And then you're asking God for another job. Do you remember that?

What was that original call for you? What was that original call where actually God said, go into that place, form culture that reflects my glory. Go back to that. That's what you're supposed to be there for.

Because in a city like Hong Kong, which is so strategic, you change one, you could change a million. You change one, you could change the whole legal profession. What does that look like for you?

[35 : 48] The city gives you the opportunity. The second is global. Wayne Meeks talks about this in the sense that in a city, you can now have a global impact. I was mortified the other day when my seven-year-old came home and she says, and we're talking about what you want to do when you're older.

And she says, I want to be a K-pop dancer. I was like, what? I need a list of all your friends and their parents. How do we get that?

Well, just globalization. It's just happening all around. Where is the epicenter of all these kind of movements, all these things? In the city.

It doesn't happen in the countryside. It happens in the city. And we see global movements happening now focused on a lot of these cities. As a city here.

We can say this because we're actually in the big cities. What are we doing to actually help push that? What are we helping to actually help form the culture now? We know it's hard, but God's placed you here for a reason.

[36 : 57] And it isn't just about this city. Jesus' great commission was just go, make disciples of all nations. But you don't need to go to Papua New Guinea anymore.

Even though Gabe is actually there in part of Indonesia preaching the gospel. There's that too. But in Hong Kong, you are afforded a very unique opportunity where you have access to so many different cultures.

So many different ethnic minorities that you can actually share the gospel with. And then they will potentially go back to their place where they're from and actually continue that good news. What are you doing?

Maybe even just think about that. Who do you have in your vicinity, in your radius that actually is from a different place? That if you were able to share the gospel with them, they could go back to their country, to their homeland and share the gospel.

You are making disciples of all nations because this world has never been more connected. It's never been as disconnected too, but it has never been more connected in that. We have access to so many, so many different cultures, so many different places.

[38 : 02] What are we actually doing with that? Another thing is, on a personal reason, cities are great. Why is a city great? Because in the cities, people are, on the whole, a bit more open to change.

If you go into a village that literally has been the same for the last few hundred years, it's harder to change. People there are a little bit more conservative. They're a little bit more traditional. This is how we've been doing things for all these years. But in a city, everyone's open to change.

Everyone's open to new ideas. And what better idea can you give people than that they are loved by a creator who is willing to die for them, that is in complete control, and is doing things for their good, and has their best interest at heart.

Isn't that the best idea that you can share? When you're surrounded by friends in school, in university, in school, who are just completely stressed about their work, that if they don't get the grades that they need, their life will completely fall apart.

They'll be disowned by their parents. What if you were able to tell them there's a God who actually cares about how hard you work, but loves you the same whatever grade that you get?

[39:10] What if you had access to those people? And the truth is you do. And people are open to that. He says to Jonah, why do you not care about the people?

They don't even know their right hand from their left hand. Isn't that the same here? We are in a city where there are people who are just confused, who are angry, who don't see what the next step is, who don't know how to improve their lives, who don't know how to get out of the trouble that they're in.

And you have the answer. One thing, though, just as I say that, and you're like, oh, James, you don't know me because I don't have the answer. In fact, my life is broken. My life is messy.

Let me tell you this. There's a story in John 4 where there's a woman who encounters Jesus, whose life is a complete mess. She has five husbands and the husband, the man she's staying with now isn't even her husband.

After she meets Jesus, is completely just mind blown by his grace and his patience and his accessibility. What does she do? She turns around and goes straight into the town and tells people, you've got to go see this guy.

[40:19] Come and see this guy who told me everything that I ever did. So basically knows all the rubbish that I have in my life, yet still chose to speak to me, still chose to cross those cultural boundaries to come and speak to me.

Come and see him. She became an evangelist in a moment. Did she go to seminary? Absolutely not. Was she perfect? Absolutely not. It doesn't take much.

You right now, recipients of this good news are already equipped to turn around and say, hey, you need to come and see this. I need to tell you about this.

There is hope. And maybe you don't know how to articulate what that hope is to them, but that's a start. To tell them that there is hope. Or rather to tell them that you care. There is a whole city of people who are wanting to have people just to connect with them.

I was talking to a group of people the other evening, and one of the things, one of the deepest heart cries that we all have, whether we're just about to enter into university or whether we are now 70 years old, is that we have this fear of loneliness.

[41:22] We have this fear of being alone. And all we need to do is go to these people and tell them that you're not alone. And how do we tell them that they're not alone?

By physically going to stand next to them and to tell them that they're not alone because you're stood right next to them. I had the privilege of having Nathan's group over at my house my first evening of my bachelor life.

And we were just talking about the people who we'd walked with and who had walked with us that had made an impact on our spiritual journey.

You know, those people that you think, oh, you know, I was mentored by Billy Graham and those kind of things. But of course, those are few and far between. The majority of people are like, yeah, I remember that guy who just hung out with me at McDonald's, who just actually just picked me up. And we just went, he just drove me home. People who were willing just to do life. It wasn't, it wasn't, it wasn't, it wasn't ever. No one said this.

[42:28] Oh, I was so blessed by that guy who preached the most amazing sermon and who just opened up the word of God and just helped me exposit what God was trying to say and, and translated the Greek and the Hebrew for me.

It was never that. It was, there's that guy who, when I, when I broke up with my girlfriend, he was just there. We didn't even talk. We just, we just stood and we just, just, he just stood next to me. And I remember that. I remember that guy who risked getting a parking ticket for me because we were just talking in the coffee shop and his car completely overran.

And that was it. And there was that person who actually was willing to come and help me move house. Can't you see that actually the way that we share the good news is through our words? Yes. But also just through our presence and our actions. That's how we show people that they're loved. You can do that right now. And you don't need to know Greek and Hebrew. I don't know

Greek and Hebrew, but you can do that right now.

That's what the city affords you. This chance where there are people who are open to new ideas, who are desperate for climbing up the ladder. There's ambition. There's ambition here.

[43 : 31] And you know that that ambition won't satisfy the hungers of their soul. And so you can be there to help them with that. Isn't that a privilege? Isn't that something that we can all do?

That's what the city offers. And maybe one final thing is the young people are all flocking to the cities because there's not much for them in the villages. So cities are getting younger and younger and younger.

For example, the organization I work for, Young Life, that's our heart. How can we get to the next generation? How do we get to the next kid and share the gospel with them to tell them that they are loved, that they are worth something, that there is hope?

That this isn't the 80s. The economic boom is going to be different now. The world is just in a different place. We went from one world power that seemed to have the moral standards all set for us to now the world is completely splitting and dividing into all these places.

And no one knows who to follow anymore. No one knows who to support anymore. What if we could tell them that actually kingdoms rise and kingdoms fall, but there is one who stands above them all. That you don't need to be worried about who's in power.

[44 : 40] You don't need to worry about what job you get. You don't need to worry about what university you're going to end up going to because there is someone who is in control. And I have this hope that some of the young people that I get to talk to, that they will be the next chief executive of Hong Kong.

They will be the next CEO of this. They will be the next leaders of the city. The city has this power to change the world.

That's why God loves the city. The question is, do you love the city? Do you love the city because of what it can give you? Or do you love the city for what you can actually give back?

Something that I'm thinking constantly. I'll read you this final quote as I finish.

That's by Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity*. To cities filled with the homeless and impoverished, Christianity offered charity as well as hope. To cities filled with newcomers and strangers, Christianity offered an immediate basis for attachments.

[45 : 43] To cities filled with orphans and widows, Christianity provided a new and expanded sense of family. To cities torn by violent ethnic strife, Christianity offered a new basis for social solidarity.

People had been enduring catastrophes for centuries without the aid of Christian theology or social structures. Hence, I am by no means suggesting that the misery of the ancient world caused the advent of Christianity.

What I am going to argue is that once Christianity did appear, its superior capacity for meeting these chronic problems soon became evident and played a major role in its triumph. For what Christians brought was not simply an urban movement.

It was a new culture. What Christians brought was a new culture. The Jesus way is what it was described.

People of the way. Why are you a Christian? What does that even mean? Is that when people look at you, they go, they do life different.

[46 : 39] There is a Jesus way. They act as though they have a God who has their best interests at heart and is in control. And so they live with this fearless abandon and faith.

The Jesus way. Do you have that? Do you have that? Do we have that? Jonah failed.

Jonah didn't have a heart for the city. In fact, he left the city to sit on the side to watch it burn. What we have, though, is the greater Jonah. The greater Jonah who went straight to the people.

And then he also left the city, but he went outside of the city to die for the city. To be hung on a cross for the sins of the city. And still had the audacity and the ridiculousness to pray, Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.

All that destruction that they are doing to themselves, that evil, forgive them. He went out of the city and died. Jonah found himself in a storm.

[47 : 54] Sleeping. And the only way to satisfy that wrath was to throw himself in an act of defiance almost to God, saying, I'd rather die than do what you've told me to do.

And Jesus found himself in a very similar situation in Mark 4. And this is where I'll land. If you've got your Bibles, I want you to actually have a look at this. Because there's a passage here that has...

A couple of years back when I was reading this, we've all read this story. We've all heard this story. There's one verse that really just stuck out to me that I love sharing about. Mark 4, verse 35.

And on that day when evening had come, he said to them, let us go across to the other side. Verse 36. And leaving the crowd, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. And other boats were with him. And a great windstorm arose, and the waves were breaking into the boat, so that the boat was already filling.

But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion. And they woke him and said to him, teacher, do you not care that we are perishing? And he awoke and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, peace, be still.

[48:56] And the wind seized and there was a great calm. He said to them, why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith? And they were filled with great fear and said to one another, who then is this that even the wind and the sea obey him?

Jesus finds himself in pretty much the exact same position that Jonah had in the boat, in the storm, fast asleep. Of course, Jesus wakes up, turns out the big reveal is he is the one who can calm the sea and the winds.

And he is in your boat. And I'm, I'm guessing, I'm not assuming, but I'm guessing that you're here because he is in your boat, which means you don't need to be afraid of the storm because the fact that you're afraid, it means that you've forgotten that he's in your boat.

Does that make sense? And you've forgotten who he is. Well, what I want to do is to finish off is show you one verse that I didn't even know existed there until now, until maybe a few years ago. Sorry. And it was this verse 35 and leaving the crowd, they took him with them in the boat. So this, they were just getting on the boat, just as he was and other boats were with him. That blew my mind.

[50:09] And I'll tell you why, that in that storm, there were other boats in the lake. There were other boats in the storm.

Now the disciples had Jesus in their boat, right? And they were still freaking out. That's us. We're the disciples who have Jesus in our boat.

And yet we're still freaking out. But sometimes we forget that there are other boats out there. Can you imagine the people in the other boats who have no clue of who Jesus is, who, when they're going through the storm, they must just be thinking about their loved ones.

Cause they think this is the moment they're going to die. And after they die, that is it. There are people out there who are terrified. And I think those of us who have been in church for a long time, we forget that.

We're so engrossed in our own idols, our own concerns and our own worries, and how Jesus is going to come through for us. We forget that there are people outside who are in boats, who are in the storm, who don't even have him in their boat.

[51:18] That's what God is telling Jonah. Care for a plant. What about those people out there? They're in, we all know people who are in boats that Jesus isn't in.

What are we doing to help? That final mission statement, we gather and then we scatter. That's it. If we just be a gathering of people where we just cocoon in, where we set up our little booth here on the 14th floor in Admiralty center in Admiralty, where we just come and we just sing a few nice songs, hold hands, sing Kumbaya, feel, feel happy.

And then we, and then we comfort each other. And then we leave it there and we stay there and we go down and we just have lunch and we just, what's the rest of the world burn? And we've, if we're not scattering, then we've missed the point of gathering.

If we're not scattering, we have missed the point of gathering. The point of gathering is that we would be encouraged. Hebrews 10 says this, do not stop meeting one another.

Do not neglect to meet one another. Why? To stir each other up in love and in good works, to encourage each other as the day draws, now the day is drawing near. And I'm not being a conspiracy theorist here.

[52:39] Today is drawing near. Kenneth and I were talking about the, um, presidential debate that we were watching the other day. The day is drawing near. This world is on fire.

Everywhere. And just when we were about to complain to God and say, what are you doing about it? He turns it back to us.

That arrow comes, that was going to Jonah. Jonah. You realize that as the arrow is heading to Jonah and we're all just being like, Jonah, you're such a jerk. Suddenly Jonah disappears from the story and the story just finishes.

Because that arrow is now coming towards us. God asking us, do we have compassion for his people? Do we have compassion and care for his world? And what are we doing about it?

So maybe my first question at the beginning was, what have you learned from the book of Jonah? My last question is, what are you going to apply? How does that change you? Because if that hasn't changed you, if that hasn't caused some kind of change in you, then you're much like Jonah who had a religious career without having to deal with God.

[53:51] you've been showing up to church without having any change in you and not playing part in any change in the world. And I implore you. I urge you. I encourage you.

Ask God, what is it that you have brought me here for? What can I do? To show people that you are gracious and merciful.

That you are slow to anger. That you are abounding in steadfast love. Show me, Lord, how to point those people to you.

The good news. There are other people out there on the lake, in the storm, that don't have you in their boat. Stir up in me a compassion for them.

Break my heart for what breaks yours. Let's pray. Amen. Lord, we've run out of time today to respond to you in song, but maybe all the song does is help us to respond to you in our hearts.

[55:12] Holy Spirit, we believe you're here. That you are moving, that you are working, even when we don't see it, even when we don't feel it.

Would you show us now, Lord, what is there in our hearts that is Jonah? What mistrust of your goodness do we have?

What fears and anxieties do we have that are not of you? And then, Lord, help us turn our eyes to the people who are in need, in need of hope, in need of peace, in need of joy.

Let us have a compassion for them. And show us how to be people who can fulfill that cultural mandate that you gave us. to take chaos and order it so that it reflects your beauty and your glory. Maybe a final thing is, Lord, if there's anyone in our lives who don't know you yet, who you want us to share something with, who you want us to show love to, to be present with, would you, would you have them pop up in our minds right now?

[56:50] Each and every one of us. If each of us went out to show love to one person this week, we believe that would begin to change the world.

The world that you love, the city that you love. So, is there anyone? Anyone? And as we go from here, Lord, would you also help us just to love those we find hard to love?

Whether they are outright enemies or whether they are people who are closest to us, who are hers the most, we choose the Jesus way. Father, forgive them for they know what they do.

And show us what to do. Yet not our will, but yours be done.

And your kingdom come. In this world and in this city. In your name we pray. Amen. Hey, so this is the end of our time.

[58:00] This is the end of our series in Jonah. We're going to start next week on a, on a summer series. And recognizing there's a bit of travel and we're not going to do a story where it's like a next episode, next episode.

We're going to do something called the summer ensemble, which is basically some of the Bible's greatest hits, uh, that actually we've all known, but maybe do we truly understand the 10 commandments, the fruit of the spirit, the beatitudes, um, the Lord's prayer, all these kinds of things that we've kind of grown up hearing, but have we actually really dove into what each one is about? That's what we're going to be doing over the summer. Uh, and, um, enjoy, enjoy the rest of this weekend and, uh, join us for lunch if you're out. See ya.