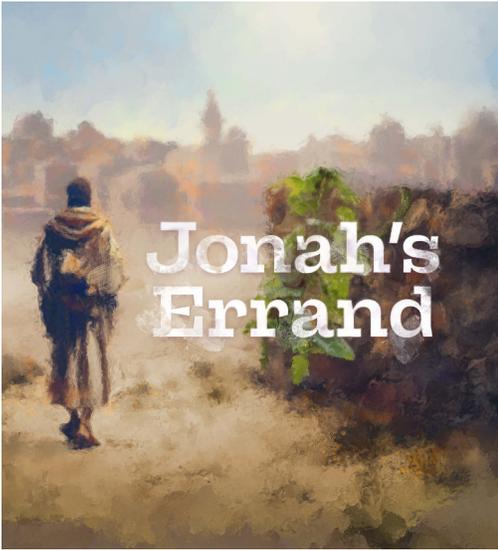




# Jonah's Errand

## Sermon Growth Guide

**May 19, 2024**  
**“My Little Plant”**



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## **Jonah's Errand - My Little Plant**

### **Jonah 4:5-11**

**Key Verse:** Jonah 4:11

“And should I not have concern for the great city of Nineveh, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left—and also many animals?”

**Big Idea:** God has placed you - concern yourself with the people God has called you to and trust Him to give you.

## **Foundations**

This week we conclude our series, *Jonah's Errand*.

Jonah spent the book of Jonah running from God. In a sense, he was in a power struggle with God. In Genesis 32, Jacob wrestled with God. By contrast, Jonah fought with God by continually fleeing the call and the people that God urged him toward. He hated the Ninevites. He knew God's heart and didn't want to see grace shown to them.

Jonah fled to Tarshish instead of Nineveh. When the storm came, rather than repent or show God a willingness to obey the errand, he told the sailors to throw him overboard (usually a certain death!). After his time in the fish, he finally repents but goes to Nineveh with a hateful heart - obeying God but with no love or compassion to those he is called to. Finally, when he sees that destruction might not be dealt to the city he hated, he turns to sit outside the city and watch - in a sense, daring God to make a move of destruction.

His final act of rebellion is to focus on and be angry for the loss of a creature comfort rather than grateful for God's resounding love.

Jonah just wants something to go right for him (and to be proven right), and when the plant fails as well, it's the last straw. He is angry enough to die. Throughout the book, Jonah fails to praise God's love or love lost souls and instead focuses on his own plan for his life and the world.

## **Understanding God's Word**

Together, read Jonah 4:5-11.

Jonah looks for ease and comfort, only to be thwarted continually. Why do the plant and the worm (juxtaposed with a big fish) seem important?

Discuss the various ways God makes Jonah uncomfortable. To what end?

## **Applying God's Word**

God has provided you with people to go to and with comforts as well.

Who are you called to? Are you trusting God in His call on your life? What is God providing you with right now?

## **Witnessing God's Word**

It takes trust and tenacity to love and devote our time and energy to the people God has called us to. Like Jonah, we sometimes flee or want to focus on our comforts instead.

It's critical to remember Acts 1:8 “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem... and to the ends of the earth.” We have this same power in us. How does your life change if you live in the Holy Spirit's power?

This city needs Jesus. Some say there are two types of churches: churches for Christians and churches that make Christians. Which are we? I think we are a blend, like all churches are, but you get the point. Do we just gather believers or do we reach the lost? This city needs Jesus. Who's in charge of that? Can we count on the schools to do it? Should City Hall be in charge of whether Colorado Springs hears the Gospel? Should we task the CSPD? It is Police Appreciation Week and we say thank you to our Police Officers who risk their lives every day for us. I know some good ones, but we probably can't train them all on evangelism. Who's in charge of this? We are. Here and online are 2,000 missionaries sent by God to reach Colorado Springs for Christ. Will we get on it, or will we, like Jonah, be more concerned with our creature comforts? **My Little Plant.** Jonah's errand is our errand. Jonah's job is our job. We have been sent to reach Colorado Springs for Christ, to be **Light and Life for the City.** Let's go.

Today is Pentecost, the day we remember the birth of the church in the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus said to wait in Jerusalem. "I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high." (Luke 24:49) Then it happened. "When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them." (Acts 2:1-4) So, now, there is no more waiting. There is going. Jesus said, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." (Acts 1:8) We have that power. No more waiting.

First Pres is a ministry to the city of Colorado Springs. Cities are growing. In 1800, about 5% of people lived in cities. In

1900, it was 15%. By 2000 it was 50% and they say by 2050 it will be 80%. I hate to say it, but our city will be over 1 million by then and a higher population than Denver proper. Does God care about cities? They are full of people. God cares about people. Cities are growing faster than churches can plant new congregations or grow to match the need. Cities full of people are getting lost and left behind, and God cares. I love what God said to Jonah at the end: "And should I not have concern for the great city of Nineveh, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left—and also many animals?" (Jonah 4:11) I think that's a great description of our times. Without the Lord, we honestly can't seem to tell right from left, up from down, North from South! Shouldn't God care? Shouldn't we care?

Jonah, when we left him, was upset that God didn't destroy Nineveh. So he camped outside the city, waiting and watching for fire and brimstone to rain down. But it never does. "Jonah had gone out and sat down at a place east of the city. There he made himself a shelter, sat in its shade and waited to see what would happen to the city. Then the Lord God provided a leafy plant and made it grow up over Jonah to give shade for his head to ease his discomfort, and Jonah was very happy about the plant." (Jonah 4:5-6) God gave Jonah a gift of comfort. It can get upwards of 120 degrees in this area. Shade is helpful. "But at dawn the next day God provided a worm, which chewed the plant so that it withered." (Jonah 4:7) My little plant! Jonah only had it for a moment, but he loved it. It wasn't his to keep. God gave it and God took it away, for a purpose. Do you remember the story of Job? The man who had all his comforts and joys taken away, his family, his life, all of it. Job said, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will leave this life. The LORD gives, and the LORD takes away. Blessed be the name of the LORD." (Job 1:21) Let's see how Jonah does. "When the sun rose, God provided a scorching east wind, and the sun blazed on Jonah's head so that he grew faint. He wanted to die, and said, 'It would be better for me to die than

to live.” (Jonah 4:8) Well, at least he’s honest. The Lord sent a hot wind. These winds brought heat, like opening an oven door. It should compel someone to run inside, to seek shelter. Jonah would rather die than reenter Nineveh and join in their celebration of mercy.

From time to time, I receive emails from people about how a sermon has reached them. Last week I challenged us to measure our idols and shatter them. I asked, “How would you react if you lost your business?” among other things. I received this note: “Tim, Your message today really spoke to my wife and me. Within the last two weeks we’ve had to shutter our business. Everything we built is gone, virtually overnight. We lost our life savings, our retirement, and now we’re hoping we don’t lose our house. And yet... we’ve gained everything. We stopped our grasping and have given ourselves fully to Jesus; He is truly our all in all. All has been stripped away, literally. We’re back to the basics: 1) we love each other and 2) God loves us. In losing everything, we’ve gained the most important thing. For the first time in a very long time, we have clarity of purpose and freedom. We’re more excited than ever at what God has for us. It feels like Jonah’s second chance. From a worldly view, we’re completely bankrupt. From God’s perspective, we have everything. ‘He who clings to his life will lose it. He who lets his life go will save it.’” Amen! Pray for that couple, but I believe what he says. God has given them a gift. The Lord gives and the Lord takes away, but not without purpose.

The Lord provided a Word to Jonah. The Lord provided a storm when he disobeyed. The Lord provided a whale when he was drowning. The Lord provided a second Word, a second chance. The Lord provided a little plant. The Lord provided a worm. The Lord provided a hot wind. Let’s talk about the Lord’s provision for a minute. John Calvin started the Presbyterian church. Calvin is famous for his confidence that God is always in charge, and always caring for us, even when it seems hard: “A true Christian possesses

a consolation which affords him more sweet satisfaction than the greatest wealth or power, because he believes that his affairs are so regulated by the Lord as to promote his salvation... If we put ourselves in such a frame of mind, then, whatever may happen to us, we shall never feel miserable or accuse God falsely because of our lot... [In trials] people will curse their life and the day of their birth, they will blame the sun and the stars, and even reproach and blaspheme God as if He were cruel and unjust. But a faithful believer will in all circumstances meditate on the mercy and fatherly goodness of God... he will not become discouraged and dissatisfied, but he will persist in this firm confidence: we are under the guardian care of our God, we are the ‘sheep of His pasture.’” (John Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion) This is not easy. We are more Jonah than Job. I know I am. We are used to praising God when things go well and cursing God when things go wrong. It is good to lament and cry out to God in hard times, but the challenge is to grow in trust. God is working things out according to His good pleasure. There are jokes about this. What does a Calvinist say after he falls down the stairs? Thank God that’s over with. Funny, but do you see how it is also a comfort—and also true, maybe? Good things. Bad things. Easy things. Hard things. God sends sun and rain on the just and the unjust, but never without purpose. God uses it all. We rest in His care.

We don’t actually know how the story ends. The book of Jonah ends with a question. “But God said to Jonah, ‘Is it right for you to be angry about the plant?’ ‘It is,’ he said. ‘And I’m so angry I wish I were dead.’ But the Lord said, ‘You have been concerned about this plant, though you did not tend it or make it grow. It sprang up overnight and died overnight. And should I not have concern for the great city of Nineveh, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left—and also many animals?’” (Jonah 4:9-11) And the animals. Is that funny? It is a good reminder that the Kingdom of God is so much larger

than our human, geopolitical concerns and contexts. Creation suffers our disobedience to God; it will rejoice when we follow Christ. Jonah, where is your heart for the lost? Where is your concern for the people who are so far from God they can't see straight? They are in the dark, groping around like the blind. This city needs Jesus. What if everything God has given you, every resource, every skill, every job, every dollar, every single thing, what if it all was given to you for a limited time to use to reach Colorado Springs for Christ? The plant was a lesson to Jonah. See how you gave your heart to this thing? Why can't you share my heart for these lost people? The hot wind was given to drive Jonah into the city again. Everything God has given you...well, two things: (1) it is not yours; it is only yours to enjoy and use for a moment in time, and (2) it is only yours by God's bidding to use for His mission to seek and to save the lost. Everything. Don't hold onto "my little plant." Use it all to seek and to save the lost.

We don't actually know how the story ends. Like the Parable of the Prodigal Son Jesus told in Luke 15, it ends with a mystery. In that story, a younger brother demanded his part of the inheritance, then went off and wasted it in loose living. When he returned, his father forgave him. But there was an older brother. He knew that when the father forgave the younger son, the family fortune would split again. He didn't want grace to extend to this disobedient little brother. The father had to go out to the field and beg the older brother to come home and join in the celebration. Jonah wouldn't go back into Nineveh for the joy; the older brother wouldn't go into the father's house. "The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him... 'My son,' the father said, 'you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.'" (Luke 15:28,31-32) Jesus doesn't say if he went. Jonah doesn't say if he went.

But there is one final twist. Who told the story of Jonah? Who could possibly have known how God spoke to Jonah in the first place? Who was with Jonah inside the whale to record his prayers? Who heard Jonah's frustrated dialogue with God? Who? Jonah. Only Jonah could have written this down. And, frankly, it is embarrassing material wouldn't you say? Jonah wrote it. That means Jonah must have had a change of heart. He must have turned and humbled himself. He must have walked back into the gates of Nineveh and ministered there. Legend says he died there. His tomb was there. Nineveh is modern day Mosul, Iraq, and the Tomb of Jonah was there until ISIS destroyed it in 2014. There is hope for Jonah.

The question sits there to convict us. In Jesus' tale. In Jonah's tale. Did he go in? The question sits there unanswered forcing us to ask ourselves, what will we do? What will you now do? How will you now live? Will you hold onto your little plant? Will you hold onto your fears and prejudices? Will you hold onto your idols and false gods? Or will you lay them all down and walk through the gates of the city to share the good news of Jesus? The people of this city will either know or not know Jesus based very much on the decisions you and I make to either share his grace or hide it. Jesus died outside the city gates. He died in our place so we could walk into grace, into mercy; so we could walk with forgiveness into the gates of the city with Jesus on our lips. Who is in charge of letting Colorado Springs know about the grace of Jesus Christ? Will you?