Jonah four, that’s where we’re going to be this morning. We’re going to finish, Lord willing, the book of Jonah. And so if you’re a guest and you don’t have a Bible with you maybe there should be one in the back of the pew in front of you or if you are in the front row, behind the pew. Jonah four is on page 774 in the pew bible. While you’re turning there let me just kind of catch up those who this may be their first time. What we’ve been doing as a church this summer together is looking at the life of Jonah and really learning about ourselves and about our God as we look at Jonah’s life. And the way that we’ve been looking at Jonah, a prophet of God, the way that we’ve been looking at his life is through just reading his autobiography which is in the Bible. We’ve just been reading his autobiography each week and so let me just kind of tell you, in essence, where we’ve gone through thus far:

Chapter one Jonah, who’s a prophet of God, a man of God, a man that God has called and used mightily in the nation of Israel, God asks him to go to the city of Nineveh which is not in Israel – it’s a pagan nation. And so Jonah says, “Well, I don’t quite like that idea, God.” Because he had a religious heart, a self-righteous heart. He thought he was better than the Ninevites. And so he said, “Thank you, no thank you. I’m going to go ahead and go do things my way.” And so Jonah, in chapter one, blatantly sins against the Lord, his God and gets on a boat and instead of heading towards Nineveh, which is where modern day Iraq and Iran are, from Israel, he heads towards Spain. He gets on a boat and he heads towards Spain. And while he’s on that boat we get a very clear picture in chapter one of God chasing Jonah down in His mercy. Through His merciful wrath He sends a storm on the boat, Jonah gets tossed over the side of the boat and God swallows him, or appoints a fish, rather, to swallow him. And Jonah is in the belly of a fish for three days and three nights. And that’s where chapter two begins.

And so in the belly of a fish in chapter two, I’m telling you, it’s quite a biography for those of you that haven’t read it yet. In chapter two of Jonah, while he’s in the belly of a fish, his sin has led him into the deepest, darkest pit one could imagine. Really somewhat hell on earth. And while he’s there God speaks to him, and Jonah preaches to himself the Gospel. And the Gospel falls in his heart and we said, his faith rose and Jonah, as it were, had really a born again conversion type of experience and the fish, once he had that experience, vomited Jonah out on to the dry land, Jonah was resurrected.

And so that leads us into chapter three. So chapter three, Jonah, being resurrected from the fish, after having an experience where the Gospel crashed into his heart and where he, in essence, died to himself, God resurrects him. And so from that resurrection he’s propelled to go into the city of Nineveh, and this is where we were last week. He goes into the city of Nineveh, the biggest, baddest, cruelest, hardest to reach place in the known world at that time, or at least it’s up there. This is number one or number two. And he goes into the city and he preaches repentance, he evangelizes – and the city, it breaks out a revival. And it’s just an amazing story. And that’s where we left last week saying, “This is our hope for the city of Denton.” Our hope for the city of Denton is that as you and I are faithful to be impacted by the Gospel, to preach to ourselves the Gospel and believe the Gospel, that it would propel us through our experience with the Gospel, our experience with our God through His Gospel, Jesus Christ, that it would propel us to go into our cities, into our city rather here in Denton, our neighborhood, and love it with all that we have.

And that’s where we left off, and so I’ve tried to catch you up so here’s how it finishes. This is the end of the book, and I’m telling you, it’s like one of those movies that you watch it and it ends and you don’t know what to feel. You know what I’m
talking about? You watch it and you’re like, “Ow. I didn’t think it was going to end that way first of all. Second of all, I don’t know if I like that it ended that way. I don’t necessarily know that I don’t like it; I just don’t know if I like it, I don’t really know what to do.” You just kind of sit there and you watch the credits roll. You know, you’re like, “What just happened? I just watched that movie for two hours and this is what...” It’s kind of how the book of Jonah ends. So let’s pick it up in chapter three verse ten because I want you to see the contrast, which is really at the heart of this last chapter between the way that God responds to Nineveh and Ninevites in their repentance in the way that Jonah responds. Chapter three verse ten. It says:

“When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he had compassion and did not bring upon them the destruction he had threatened. But Jonah was greatly displeased and became angry. He prayed to the LORD, “O LORD, is this not what I said when I was still at home? That is why I was so quick to flee to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity. Now, O LORD, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live.” But the LORD replied, “Have you any right to be angry?” Jonah went out and sat down at a place east of the city. There he made himself a shelter, sat in its shade and waited to see what would happen to the city. Then the LORD God provided a vine and made it grow up over Jonah to give shade for his head to ease his discomfort, and Jonah was very happy about the vine. But at dawn the next day God provided a worm, which chewed the vine so that it withered. 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.” But God said to Jonah, “Do you have a right to be angry about the vine?” “I do,” he said. “I am angry enough to die.” But the LORD said, “You have been concerned about this vine, though you did not tend it or make it grow. It sprang up overnight and died overnight. But Nineveh has more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left, and many cattle as well. Should I not be concerned about that great city?”

Pray with me. “Father, I pray that the song we just sang would be more than a song. I pray for those in here who have a dead heart that You would just cause it to beat. I pray that You’d make hearts of stone bleed. And for those of us who are asleep, I pray that You’d wake us up. I pray that by Your Spirit You might infuse power into this Scripture. I pray that you might infuse power into the words that I’m about to speak. And I say before everyone here today that I’m going to try to do the best job I can to explain this text, but Holy Spirit, we need You to come and speak to our lives. We need You to draw us to Jesus Christ, to show us Jesus Christ and to cause us to fall in love with Him through the text of Jonah. So would You do that this morning in our hearts? I know there’s hundreds of different people here in different places, but Lord, You know all. And so speak. In Jesus we pray. Amen.”

Before we do this, there’s three things that we do as a church that I’ve really wanted us to see this summer as we’ve gone through this book. It wasn’t just a random book I had picked. And the three things I really wanted us to see was that there’s a huge distinction in the Bible between religion and the gospel of Jesus Christ. Religion is man. And when I say religion I’m referring to any other religion in the world. Religion is man trying to reach God in their own efforts. Religion is man trying to earn their way, work their way, figure out their way to God. The gospel of Jesus Christ is God reaching down and grabbing sinful man and pulling them up towards Him. And the reason we’ve read Jonah is because I’ve wanted us to see that stark contrast. In fact, that reason alone is really the heart of what chapter 4 is about.

Let me read you a quote. This is one of the commentaries I’ve read. Speaking of Jonah, it says, “I have met men who would give their right arms to see what Jonah saw in Nineveh, for whom the privilege of being an instrument of awakening in the hands of God would be sweeter than life itself. From any viewpoint, it was a time of unusual grace. The circumstances that brought Jonah to the city, the unction that attended his preaching, the Holy Spirit miraculously converting the whole city including the king and the penitent faith of the citizens, all these are indications of the mercy that dawned in Nineveh. It was a story to which our Lord Jesus Christ could point back to and say, ‘The men of Nineveh
will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah.' In fact, it was kind of a foretaste of the day of Pentecost, when once again God would grant repentance that leads to life to the peoples of the gentile world. There are many Christians today who long for a time when God's servants need to go only a day's journey until there's a large response to the word of God. How many would have sacrificed everything to have seen those revival days in Nineveh? What would we do if a day of national repentance were declared in our own land or if the leaders of the nation clothed themselves in garments of repentance and began to cry to God? But we discover that the final chapter of Jonah is perhaps the most puzzling and mysterious of all. It almost seems like the prototype of our modern dramas in which, instead of everything turning out right in the end, things seem to fall apart and we are left feeling disturbed and uneasy. After preaching, Jonah witnesses the scenes of repentance, engages in prayer and then he withdraws from the city. The heart of the significance of this chapter lies in the contrast between God's response to Nineveh – gospel, and Jonah's response to it – religion.

Even as we go through and walk through chapter 4, I want you to be mindful of the extreme contrast the Bible paints between the gospel and religion. And I know that there are so many of you in here who are religious, but you've never been changed by the gospel, and it's not the same thing. Having religion and being changed by the gospel couldn't be more different. So that's the first thing we've been looking at. The second thing we've been looking at is that the book of Jonah over and over again doesn't just paint a picture between the contrast of the gospel and religion, it then gives a concrete picture of what the gospel looks like. We use words like sin and grace, we just kind of throw those words out in church. A lot of times we don't even know what they mean. What the book of Jonah does is says, “No, this is what sin is. A man being disobedient to God and running in the other direction, that's sin.” And it paints a concrete picture of sin. And then it says, “This is what grace is. Grace is God, despite the sinner running away, chasing them and calling them to repentance, because He loves them and wants them to know Him.” And again in chapter 4, you're going to see Jonah sinning, and you're going to see the Lord chasing him despite his sin. You're going to see as concrete a picture of the gospel as I know of in the Scriptures. That's the second reason we've been reading this this summer. The third reason is because all throughout the book of Jonah we see God's love for a city of people. And if you haven't been here long at the Village, you'll find our real quickly that we love Jesus Christ and we love the city of Denton. We love the city of Denton, we love our neighborhood, we love the people of the city of Denton and the culture that those people create. We love it. And one of the reasons I wanted to read this book is because God loved the city of Nineveh and we can learn some things through Him and through this book.

That's the introduction. Let's get going. Let's start back in Jonah 3:10 through chapter 4. “When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God relented of the disaster that he had said he would do to them, and he did not do it. But it displeased Jonah exceedingly and he was angry.” People being forgiven by the God that had forgiven him displeased Jonah exceedingly. What in the world? Have you ever met this guy? Jonah had just had this experience where he sinned in chapter 1, he ran away from God, God chases him down, puts him in the belly of the fish, Jonah realizes he's a sinner saved by sheer grace, so God vomits him up and he goes into the city. But again, he's angry when God does the same thing to the Ninevites. Wasn't that the whole reason he went into Nineveh, so he could see God's grace manifested in their lives like it was manifested in his? And when it happens, he becomes angry. Why in the world? Well, it tells us. “And he prayed to the LORD and said, "O LORD, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country? That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster." So he just said, “I’m angry because You forgave them.” So it looks like that old sin of self-righteousness didn't die completely in Jonah when he was in the belly of the fish. And here's what he just said, “I'm still racist. I still struggle with racial discrimination. I still think I'm better than the Ninevites. And although I've had an experience with You in the belly of the fish and it should have completely knocked it out of the park for me, apparently I didn't get the point.” I think he got the point in the belly of the fish, but I think he forgot it when he got to Nineveh. So he gets the point, he has this resurrection like experience, it pushes him in the city for mission and once
he gets there and preaches to Nineveh and there’s a revival, the whole sin of pride and self-righteousness has come up in him. So here’s the lesson here. Just because you had a gospel experience yesterday doesn’t mean you’re not going to have to battle your sin today and put it to death. And if you don’t, you may just end up in the very place that God’s brought you out of if you’re not careful.

And here’s why I know this is so crucial to you and me. I get numerous e-mails each week from you of “Why in the world can’t I quit doing that sin?” I think so many of us live here. We’re just on this treadmill of sin, this cycle of insanity. Why in the world does this same sin continue to own me like it did in Jonah’s life? What in the world is the reason I can’t get rid of this? And I don’t want to oversimplify and overgeneralize this morning, because there’s a lot of different reasons this is so. But I think for a large lot of us in here this morning here’s why. It’s because we’re still trying to live our faith week to week instead of day to day. Jonah preaches the gospel to himself in the fish and God is gracious in His Holy Spirit to reveal the gospel to him and it changes his life. But somewhere along the way he quit preaching the gospel to himself daily. He quit picking up his cross daily. If you still think that you can get by on this faith thing without sin knocking you clean out in the first round, if you think you can still get through this thing without daily preaching the gospel to yourself and begging the Holy Spirit to cause you believe it and cling to Jesus, you’re going to wind up on the very same ship that God saved you from. And the reason so many of us continue to be owned by our sin is because we think that if we spend time and submit to the Lord three times a week, that will be enough. That’s not enough. That’s why Jesus said, “If you want to follow Me, you’re going to have to pick up your cross every single day.” And I would even say numerous times a day. Not three times a week. If you put your gloves down for one day, you’re going to get knocked clean out. Or even worse, you’ll make it a few weeks and then you’ll get knocked clean out. You’ll make it a few weeks and you’ll be like, “I’ve got this. I don’t need the Holy Spirit. I don’t need to submit. I don’t need to obey. I don’t need to read the Scriptures.” And I’m not talking about just doing a list here. I’m saying if you don’t do the spiritual disciplines, as John Owen said, “If you’re not killing your sin, it’s going to be killing you.” That’s what happened to Jonah. He had this moment, he had this experience, it was good, it was real, it was rich, it was deep, it resurrected him and he went into mission. But somewhere between chapter 3 and chapter 4, he quit dying to himself daily.

A few weeks ago, we talked about Jonah’s self-righteousness. We talked about how maybe you’re not racist, but at the end of the day all of us probably have some dormant racism in us. If we’re to be honest, we all have some group pride in us that’s dormant in us. And it may not work itself out in a way where it comes to the surface, but regardless if you think you’re racist or not, we’re all self-righteous. Whatever it is for you, maybe you’re self-righteous about not being self-righteous. Whatever you put your identity in outside of Jesus Christ, how hard you work, how good you are, how religious you are, whatever you become self-righteous about, we all have the proclivity to do that. I know some of you were convicted about that, but what have you done with that for the last three weeks? Did you just come in here and hear it, see it and be enlightened by it and go, “Oh, that’s why I sin, because I put my identity in this self-righteousness,” and go to work the next day and leave it all behind? Or have you been dying to it daily? This is a concrete example of this for us. Because if you’re not dying to your sin daily by submitting yourself and pleading with the Holy Spirit to help you believe the gospel, you’re going to wind up where Jonah wound up.

And listen to how devastating sin is if you don’t kill it. Listen to how devastating it becomes in Jonah’s life. Because it goes from him being self-righteous, thinking he’s better than the Ninevites, and look where his sin takes him. Look how it progresses. And if you don’t daily deal with it by preaching the gospel to yourself, begging the Holy Spirit to cause you to believe it, listen to where it’s going to take you. And some of you are already here, so you’re going to empathize with Jonah this weekend. Jonah says, “Now, O LORD, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live.” He just went from being self-righteous to angry to being so depressed that he wants God to kill him.” And I don’t know what you know about depression. I was diagnosed with clinical depression when I was three years old. Clinical depression is the most self-absorbed disease I have ever experienced in my life. And some people are born physiologically inclined
and they need some real help. I was one of those babies. But most of us get depressed because, like Jonah, we just sin. And we keep sinning and we keep sinning until it leads us to the place where we'd rather die. And the reason you get to that place is because you’re so self-absorbed that you can’t even think about anything else. So all you can see is what’s happening to you and your circumstances. And so you go, “Life’s not worth living.” Do you know how selfish a statement like that is? That is where sin takes you. I think this is what it means when the Scripture says the wages of sin is death. And if it doesn’t kill you physically, it’s going to leave you in a place that’s probably even worse, where you wish it would. There are so many of us are here. Just listen to your conversations in your friendship circles. If you’re 20 in here, our parent’s generation didn’t like to talk about a lot of stuff. They didn’t want to show weakness. They weren’t taught to be vulnerable. They weren’t taught to be authentic. And so they just hide their weakness. Everybody knows that we’ve got it, but they just weren’t comfortable sharing it? In response, the twenty somethings have swung all the way over and all we like to talk about is our weaknesses. Part of that is healthy, because the Bible commands us to repent and confess our sins to one another so that God can heal us. But we’ve taken it too far and it’s just so self-absorbed. Listen to your conversations about what happened to me and why I had a hard day and why this didn’t go right. This is where sin takes us, and it’s so subtle. It’s so subtle with self-righteousness.

I went and saw *The Dark Knight* this weekend. It’s really a fascinating look into the psyche of the American mind. It’s such a great movie that I forgot it’s a *Batman* movie. Obviously Batman is the hero figure, the vigilante for justice and what’s good, and the Joker is the picture of what’s bad. And Batman would never kill anybody, because that would be over the line. Even though he’s kind of a terrorist in his own sense, he never really kills anybody. But Joker wants Batman to kill somebody. He wants Batman to kill somebody just to prove that he’s just like him deep down. And so do you know how the Joker tempts him? Self-righteousness. He thinks that if he can make Batman self-righteous enough, it would cause Batman to kill him. Even Hollywood knows how subtle self-righteousness is. And when it balloons, it leaves you pregnant with self-absorption, self-focus, wishing you were dead. Here’s why I need you to feel this with me this morning. If you don’t feel this, when Isaac gets up here and sings “My dead heart now is beating,” you will not worship. And if you don’t recognize that this is where all of us are prone to be, you will not kill sin daily. You’ll think that you’re self-reliant and that you can do it yourself and that you don’t need the Holy Spirit. Now you would never say that to me, but functionally that’s what you say. You say, “I’ve got this one. I know I’ve got a little self-righteousness here, but I’ll deal with that later.” And we’re just drifting. You drift one day, you drift two days, you drift...eventually you end up where Jonah was, where I’ve lived the majority of my life. You become so self-absorbed that when something goes wrong, you blame everything on your circumstances and go, “I just want to kill myself.” Because this went wrong and this went wrong and this went wrong, and you have tunnel vision and no ability to see outside of yourself.

But here’s the hope. That’s not where the story leaves us. It doesn’t leave us with Jonah’s self-absorption. Listen to the concrete picture of mercy that begins to flood in to this passage. Let’s pick it back up at verse 4. “And the LORD said, “Do you do well to be angry?”” So you kind of get an indication here from the Lord that He’s going to pursue Jonah because He loves him. “Jonah went out of the city...” Just as a side note, he went into the city in chapter 3 to live missionally. When he becomes self-absorbed because of his sin, he leaves the city. Notice the interplay between missional living and sin. If you find those groups that just talk about themselves, I guarantee you they’re not living missionally. Which is probably one of the reasons they’re talking about themselves all the time, because they don’t have anything else to talk about. And if they do talk about stories of life change, they’re talking about the ones from the video, not their own. Notice the interplay. He sins, becomes depressed, so he quits living missionally. He subjects himself to being on the sidelines pouting and saying, “I don’t want to have an active role in God’s mission anymore.” And like we said before, some people would give their right arm to be in this city at this time. And Jonah’s so self-absorbed that he’s going, “Nope, I’m going to leave the city.” So he goes outside 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.” Now here comes a concrete picture of mercy, of how good our God is despite us. “Now the LORD God appointed a plant and made it come up over Jonah...” We’ve
seen the word “appointed” before in the book of Jonah. Look back at Jonah 1:17, “And the LORD appointed a great fish to swallow up Jonah.” Back to chapter 4, “Now the LORD God appointed a plant and made it come up over Jonah, that it might be a shade over his head, to save him from his discomfort.” Now some of you may be thinking that Jonah sounds like a prima donna, but let me remind you he’s in the desert. How merciful was God just to give him a drink of cool water, even though he just spit in God’s face? And God said, “You know what? I’m going to provide a plant for you. You need some rest.” But He doesn’t stop there because what he needs more than rest is to repent. So God doesn’t just give him rest. Look in verse 6. “So Jonah was exceedingly glad because of the plant. But when dawn came up the next day, God appointed a worm that attacked the plant, so that it withered. When the sun rose, God appointed a scorching east wind, and the sun beat down on the head of Jonah so that he was faint.” This is where some people check out and go, “See? I don’t like the God of the Old Testament. He’s not merciful. Why didn’t He just give him more plants? He could maybe fix Jonah’s circumstances and it would all be better. Why did He have to do that? He sent a worm to eat up the plant, and then He sent a scorching wind with the sun to make him miserable. How is that mercy? It seems to me that God doesn’t care about Jonah.”

I love my father. He is such a good father. And he was such a good father when I was a kid. I want to be careful here, because some of you were abused by your father, and that’s not what I’m talking about at all. That’s wicked and evil. A man who enjoys disciplining their sons and daughters by beating them is wicked. I’m not talking about that, and if that’s you, I can’t even imagine. I’d love to meet you and point you to someone who can empathize with you and who has walked through that and found healing. But my dad was a good man who loved the Lord. So do you what accompanied that? When I acted up, he would discipline me...with a belt...severely. And I’ve struggled with depression, so this little thing of self-righteous going to anger is how it would play out in me. So one day I had gotten real angry and I went in my room. I didn’t know what to do. I wasn’t mature enough to think through and control my thoughts and submit them to the Lord. And so I grabbed something and broke all my windows in my bedroom. And to some of you parents, if your kid’s not doing that, praise the Lord. This is how I dealt with it. I was angry. And then I just went on my bed and sulked. I was so depressed. I just wanted to be dead. So my father comes home from work that day and mom was like, “You need to handle him.” And I could hear him coming in thinking, “This is not going to be good.” So he comes in and, out of love, just disciplined me. And he sat down beside me on the bed, and I was so self-absorbed. I looked at him and said, “You don’t care about me.” My dad stand up, and he’s not a small man. I have never seen my dad weep like that. I couldn’t see because I was so self-absorbed that he was loving me. And so many kids don’t have a father to love them when they go astray, and he was loving me in the hopes that it would draw me back to the path of righteousness and living right and doing good and living a good life. Our Heavenly Father is utterly more gracious. I know some of you are like, “Why doesn’t God help me? He doesn’t care about me. If He cared about me, He'd just give me what I wanted.” No He wouldn’t. He’d give you what you needed, and He probably has. And you need to recognize that He’s a good God. He’s a good Father. And just like my dad, He disciplines those children that He loves. And you need to be worried if He’s not disciplining you. You need to be worried if He’s just letting you sulk and He’s not tearing up the plant and He’s not sending a wind. That’s the wrath of God. You don’t want that. You don’t want Him to leave you alone.

And so Jonah, in the end of verse 8, “asked that he might die and said, “It is better for me to die than to live.” But God said to Jonah, “Do you do well to be angry for the plant?” He’s just so loving. He asks him once, then He chastises him once and Jonah still doesn’t get it. God doesn’t get his feelings hurt and run away. He’s going to work in Jonah’s life. And He says again, “Are you serious? You’re complaining over a plant.” Verse 9, “And he said, “Yes, I do well to be angry, angry enough to die.” He still doesn’t get it. So listen to how God responds. “And the LORD said, “You pity the plant, for which you did not labor, nor did you make it grow, which came into being in a night and perished in a night. And should not I pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know their right hand from their left?” In other words, He’s saying, “They don’t know Me.” So He’s taken this to say, “Not only are you selfish, but look
what you’re missing out on. You’re missing out on the very heartbeat of mission. There is 120,000 people that you can see from where you’re at who don’t know who I am who I’m trying to rescue them, and you’re complaining about a plant.” How out of the game is that, and how often do we end up there? So the way that the book ends is God asking Jonah, “Why do you love that plant and care about that plant more than you care about people who need to be rescued by Me? Are you serious? You’re going to weep about that plant and you hate these people?” Religion vs. the gospel.

I heard somebody say one time that God created everything, so He oversees everything and thinks that it’s good and beautiful and He loves His creation, but out of His creation, he first and foremost loves those whom He created in His image, people. And the person who said this asked, “So how come when we have calendars as Christians, if God loves people more than the rest of creation, why do we always have flowers on the calendars? Why do we always have mountains?” I get it. They’re pretty, but it’s just this mindset of, “If God loves people more than all of creation, why aren’t people more beautiful to us than mountains?” The quote went on and said, “Since God loves people more than He loves plants, He must love the city more than He loves the country.” I thought that was great because we’re really focused on our city here. My wife again was like, “Really what the book ends by asking Jonah and asking us, “What do you love more than people?” Some of you are like, “Well I love God more than people.” Well you can’t love God without loving people, not really. So what do you love more than people who God wants to rescue, who need to know Him? Maybe it’s your garden. I don’t know. That doesn’t make me any better than you; it just means we’re different.

As I was finishing reading and studying through this, I asked my wife that question. We both agreed on the same thing. So I’m going to be honest in hopes that you’d be honest with yourself. Do you know what we love more than we love people? We love ourselves. I absolutely love myself more than I love other people. Do you know what a pity that is? And we can laugh at Jonah all we want and go, “That idiot,” but every single day, every single week, I choose to love me over others who desperately don’t know their right hand from their left. And then I come in here and look at Jonah’s life and feel better than him somehow. And do you know why the book ends this way? Essentially He’s asking this question: Are you willing to be like Christ? Would Jonah be willing to die to himself? That’s how the book ends. And I love that it doesn’t tell us. It kind of leaves us to answer it for ourselves as well. Let me read you this quote. It says, “The closing chapter of the story of Jonah is indeed enigmatic. It may well leave us asking the question, ‘Whatever did become of Jonah?’” Because we don’t actually know. We don’t know how he responded, what he did. We can speculate, but we don’t know. I think Jonah, just because of the way the Lord was pursuing him, eventually repented again and started walking with the Lord again, my hope for Jonah and myself is that every day, all of life became repentance for Jonah. All of life is repenting, preaching gospel to yourself, every thought, every day. And if you don’t, it leads you away. It leaves us asking the question: Whatever did become of him? “The story is left unfinished, but in fact that is the whole point of its writing. We have examined it as a piece of biography set in a given place and time and history, but it is more than that. It is also a parable. It is shaped in the same way that our Lord’s parables are, not only as a fascinating piece of history but to force us to contemplate our own personal destiny. It carries no conclusion because it summons us to write the final paragraph. It remains unfinished in order that we may provide our own conclusion to its message. We stand together with Jonah in need of the mercy of God to enable us from this day on to be obedient to God’s commands and to live to the praise of His glorious grace.”

So here’s how we close this book as a family. Are you and I willing to pick up our cross daily and follow Jesus. Because here’s what Jesus did in contrast to Jonah. Jesus Himself wound up with a bunch of plants overlooking the city one time. He was in the garden of Gethsemane. And as He overlooked the city and thought about the cross, the beginning of His torturous, excruciating execution was right in front of Him. And He begged the Lord His Father, “Father, if there’s any other way to do this besides Me going into that city and dying for the people so Your glory can be rectified, let me know because I don’t want to do it.” And the Father, “No.” And the Son said, “Let Your will be done, not Mine.” And in contrast to Jonah, who ran out of the city, Jesus went into the city and died the most excruciating death, because He knew there
were tons of people who didn’t know their right hand from their left, and He knew it was the only way to rectify the glory of the Father and draw men and women to be saved unto Him. And Jesus went into the city and humbled Himself unto death, even death on a cross. Are we willing to pick up that cross daily, numerous times daily, and follow Him? That’s where it leads us this morning.

Let’s pray, “Father, thank You for Jonah. I’m so much like him. And so I can relate to him. I thank You that even in giving us an autobiography of a man that was so prone to wander away from You, that You have encouraged me and caused me to want to run to You and not away from You. Because when we run away from You, it just doesn’t go well. And so I pray that You’d give us the courage by Your Spirit this morning to run to You. I know there are men and women in here who have been running away from You for far too long. Would You capture their heart? Would You convict their heart? Would You draw them and allure them to Yourself by Your Spirit in the next few moments? Would You unify our body as we go out as missionaries this morning? I pray that if we’ve been sitting on the outside of the city, we would go back in and follow Jesus by picking up our cross and saying, ‘I love people even more than I love myself.’ So do these things. In Jesus we pray. Amen.”