



**Summer at Woodland Hills**  
**Part 4 – 6 Big Questions About Jonah**  
Alex Himaya

I want to tackle a scripture that's an Old Testament scripture; it's a scripture we heard when we were kids and when we heard it, we thought it was cool, and when we tell our kids this story, they think it's cool, but when you reread it as an adult, you think *really?* It's the story of Jonah and the Whale. How many of you have heard this story before? I want to dive in.

A few weeks ago, I preached for a friend in Nashville, Tennessee. He asked me to tackle some Old Testament childhood story. So, I've been studying this story for the last several weeks. I wish, had I known what the weather would be, I would have picked Noah and the flood, but this Jonah's story.

Last week, Ted was at our church. I don't always get to be there, in fact, I rarely get to be there when he is there. It was a real treat to get to be there last week on Father's Day and for him to teach. Sometimes when you're friends with pastors and all that, you can get up and make jokes about them and I could do that about Ted, but I would rather just tell you, what a blessing!

Last night, Meredith and I were lying in bed after I heard Ted preach on Sunday morning and we were just commenting to one another about what a fantastic preacher Ted Cunningham has become. It's not just his mastery of comedy and humor, but his mastery of the Word of God and how he works at that trait and works at the skill that God has gifted him at. You should just really thank the Lord today, right now, for Ted and Amy.

I've been studying this text, and a few weeks ago I was getting on a plane to go to this church in Nashville. One of the perks of flying all the time, which is not glorious at all, actually, is that you get to get on the plane first and then stand up when the other people come in. If you have a choice, you would never sit by the widow. You sit by the aisle where you can escape. So, I'm sitting in the aisle and I'm reading the Book of Jonah.

Eventually, the lady that's going to sit in the window seat comes. I get out and help her put her bag in. She asked what I was reading.

I said, "I'm reading the Bible."

She said, "I see that. What part of the Bible are you reading?"

I said, "Jonah."

She just started laughing. It bothered me a little bit because I'm a little sensitive and mercy type. I know you don't believe that because I'm not. But it bothered me a little. She was older so I was trying to be respectful when I said, "Why are you laughing?"

She said, "You don't believe that do you?"

I said, "I do."

She said, "You believe the Book of Jonah?"

I said, "I believe the Book of Jonah."

She said, "You really believe," through this sarcastic laughter, "that a man was thrown off a ship, swallowed up by a fish, spit out on the shore, and lived to tell about it. And you believe this story?"

I said, "I believe it."

She said, "Can you prove it?"

I said, "I don't know how I would."

She said, "Well, if you can't prove it, maybe it's not true."

I said, "I can't prove it; it's just faith. God gave me faith; it's a gift. I receive it and you could receive it too. If you'd ask for it, he'd give you the gift of faith."

She said, "Well, I wish you could prove it."

I said, "I can't prove it, but one day, when I get to heaven, I will ask Jonah."

She said, "What if Jonah is not in heaven?"

I said, "Well, then, you ask him."

And that ended our conversation.

I want to help answer some of the questions today. By the way, when you're ADD, God has taken some of the deficits that he allowed me to have as a child through comprehension and with all the ADD stuff that comes with ADD. I was the project at school, in elementary. I don't know if my dad was paying teachers behind the scenes or what, but I stayed after school every day, trying to figure out comprehension and trying to learn. Quite honestly, some of those things that I viewed as such a negative part of my life, God has used to cause me to study the scripture in an entirely different way.

I don't know why, but more of the culture appears to be ADD today than used to be. Quite honestly, it's become this real gift that I am to the culture because I study the scripture through ADD lenses and because I ask all the questions all the time of why every time I read a verse and write down questions and write down answers, it's become an effective teaching method in our culture. I just want to use that culture and that teaching method today, and I want to give you six big questions that I wrote down when I read the Book of Jonah and I'm sure you have the very same questions. As I deal with these questions, maybe I'll answer some questions you've had.

## 1. Who was Jonah?

This is a great question, and it's a really good one to begin with as you look at this book that bears his name. If you don't know, I'll just tell you today. Jonah was a prophet to the Nation of Israel. In that day, Israel had a civil war and there were two kingdoms. You know this if you've studied the Bible at all, right? Two different kingdoms. In fact, I'll show you a map. The southern kingdom is known as the Kingdom of Judah and the capitol of Judah is Jerusalem. The northern kingdom, after the civil war, is called the Kingdom of Israel and the capitol was a place called Samaria.



This is just a little back story and context as to who Jonah is and that's where he was. He was a prophet to the Kingdom of Israel to a king named Jeroboam II. In fact, Jonah is mentioned a few places in scripture. Obviously, he's mentioned a lot of times in the book that bears his name, but he's also given a cameo over in 2 Kings 14. There is a king name Jeroboam II who only gets seven verses in the whole Bible. And in those seven verses, Jonah is mentioned as one of his prophets.

In fact, let me just show it to you in 2 Kings 14 - ***23 Jeroboam II, the son of Jehoash, began to rule over Israel in the fifteenth year of King Amaziah's reign in Judah. Jeroboam reigned in Samaria forty-one years. 24 He did what was evil in the Lord's sight. He refused to turn from the sins that Jeroboam (the first) son of Nebat had led Israel to commit.***

So, Jeroboam II is a wicked king in a long line of wicked kings in the Nation of Israel. They had turned away from God. They had forgotten God, forgotten his laws. In fact, they were killing his prophets and quite honestly, in the history of the nation, there is no indication that he ever turned back to God or that

he ever came around and got this whole thing straightened out. But God, in his mercy, and God, in his grace, gave mercy and grace towards Israel and helped them out.

Look at Verse 25. ***Jeroboam II recovered the territories of Israel between Lebo-hamath and the Dead Sea, just as the Lord, the God of Israel, had promised through Jonah son of Amittai, the prophet from Gath-hepher.*** Jonah, at this time, delivered good news from God to a wicked king. It came true and so he is sitting pretty with his boss. This is an amazing season for him. Until God comes calling with another assignment. And that assignment was to go to Nineveh, which begs the second question.

## 2. Where is Nineveh?

This is a great question. Nineveh is the capitol of Assyria. It's on the banks of a river called the Tigris River. If you read the Bible, there are two rivers that are mentioned over and over again: The Euphrates and the Tigris. They fork out from one another and over in this peninsula. That's where Nineveh is. In fact, in your lifetime, archeologist discovered where ancient Nineveh is. They dug it up in a place called Mosul, Iraq. You've heard of that because you pay attention to the war, right? Let me just show you this map so you get a picture as to how this is playing out. This is Israel over here. This is Joppa. That's where the Bible says Jonah got a boat and started sailing.



God told Jonah to go to Nineveh over here on the Tigris river. He gets in a boat and sails towards Tarshish. Do you see the point? He is going as far as you can go in the known world. This is modern day Spain by the way. This is the known world. This is as far as you can go from where it was that God was telling him to go.

He gets on this boat. You know the story, right? The storm comes, the sailors are wondering what's going on, they're praying to their gods. Jonah says, "It' me and my issue; throw me overboard." They throw him overboard and, eventually, a fish comes and swallows him up. He would have drowned or ended up on the shore, but that wasn't God's plan. A fish came and grabbed him, which begs my third question.

### 3. Was it a whale that swallowed Jonah?

We think it's a whale because we even refer to the story as Jonah and the Whale. Could have been a whale, but there aren't a whole lot of whales in the Mediterranean Sea. And the Bible doesn't say whale. The Bible says big fish. In case you were wondering, I did a little research. There are only two fish in the Mediterranean Sea that are actually big enough to swallow up a person. The first one is called the sperm whale. There are not a bunch of them. It could have been a whale, but there are not a bunch of them in the Mediterranean Sea. The other one is called the great white shark. I just have to confess to you that I like that story better. You can just hear the music from the Jaws movie as Jaws – which we just celebrated 40 or 50 years, I heard on the radio – comes out of the water and grabs Jonah and takes him back under the water. This is the story as I'm laying it out in my mind, which raises another question.

### 4. Did Jonah really survive in the belly of the fish?

Let me answer that by asking this question first. How many of you remember a story called Pinocchio? If you don't remember it, it will come back around. They're doing live action with all these Disney stories. Has anybody seen Aladdin with Will Smith? He actually does a good job with that. I saw it with my kids, and I thought it was actually a little dark, but then I thought through it. All the Disney stories are kind of dark. It's why we're all screwed up actually. They are all really, really dark. In fact, every once in a while, I'll watch something that I watched as a kid and think, *Why did my parents let me watch that?* I'll call them and they'll say, "You didn't understand; it was over your head..." Apparently not. I'm in counseling now.

But we know the story of Pinocchio where Pinocchio and Geppetto get swallowed by the whale. Do you remember that? In fact, look at this image. This is the image we have in our minds, right? The inside of the whale is like this big cavity, like an aquarium. And you can see the ribs and water is floating around in there and you know that in Pinocchio, he and Geppetto were on that raft just floating around.

I think what we've done, because we're so visual in this generation, is we've taken a childhood story like that and a childhood image like that and we have laid that preconceived idea on top of a Bible story that we think that's what it looks like in the belly of a whale. Come on now. That's ridiculous when you think through it. Remember that in Pinocchio they lit a fire, which was genius, that caused the whale to sneeze them out. We've taken this ridiculous notion and we've laid it on top of scripture that we think that's what was going on in the belly of the fish that swallowed Jonah up.

That's silly. Now I don't have to say, to a room full of rednecks, "That's silly," because you're not even allowed in this room if you've not caught a fish, right? How many have ever caught a fish? How many of you ever caught a fish that had a fish in the belly when you cut it open? All of us are rednecks; we've done this. Any of those fish ever alive in there? No. They're dead because they have been swallowed up and they're in the belly of that fish and there are fish inside the fish because they ate the fish and the fish are dead. So, we have this image of these ribs and this thing and that's what's going on in the middle of it.

In fact, when I was in the fifth grade, Doug Johnson told me that it has been proven that if you take your hand... If were physically possible to take your arm and shove it down your throat, into your stomach, when you remove it, it would be a nub because the stomach acid would have eaten your hand. Now, I don't know if Doug was right or not, but that scarred me for a long, long time. And every time I have a little indigestion and I feel the acid getting through the flap up into my chest, I'm like *It's going to eat my heart away*. Stomach acid is a powerful, powerful thing.

So, Jonah is in this stomach acid and he's floating around in there and I think... In fact, some of you say, "Are you saying what I think you're saying?" Exactly. I'm saying exactly what you think I'm saying. Jonah is in there for three full days, according to the scripture. Here's a question for you. How long can you hold your breath? I am saying exactly what you think I'm saying. I think Jonah died. And a lot of Bible scholars hear me say that and they say, "You can't say that, Alex. That can't be the truth." One day, in heaven, they will apologize to me for saying that.

When I read the scripture, I think it actually makes more sense. By the way, what they do when they argue with me about this is what they say, "Jonah prayed in Chapter 2. He prayed in the belly of the whale. How would he pray if he were dead?" Well there are a lot of answers to that question. One is found over in Luke 16. Do you remember the story that Jesus told about the rich man and Lazarus? And the rich man died and the dead rich man, from a place called Sheol, cried out to Abraham. So the dead man is praying and crying out to Abraham.

There are lots of stories that could play this out. By the way, Jonah, too, I think, indicates this as well. Look at Jonah 2: 1 – ***"I cried out to the Lord in my great trouble, and he answered me.*** Amazing theology in that verse. You should underline that one and highlight Jonah 2:1 because that is the story of the Bible that you and I were in trouble, we cried out in our trouble and God answered us in our trouble. ***I called to you from the land of the dead, and Lord, you heard me!*** That word in the Hebrew is Sheol, the very same place that that rich man cried out to Abraham from.

In fact, jump down to Verse 6 if you would. ***6 I sank down to the very roots of the mountains. I was imprisoned in the earth, whose gates lock shut forever.*** So why do I think that Jonah died? First of all, practicality tells me that in the belly of a fish for three days, I think you died. But I think it's important biblically as well.

Turn over to Luke 11. In Luke 11, this is Jesus Christ himself who is talking. ***29 As the crowd pressed in on Jesus, he said, "This evil generation keeps asking me to show them a miraculous sign. But the only sign I will give them is the sign of Jonah. 30 What happened to him was a sign to the people of Nineveh that God had sent him. What happens to the Son of Man will be a sign to these people that he was sent by God."*** Or that "I, the son of man, was sent my God."

So, what was the sign of Jonah? We don't have to guess, by the way. Jesus tells us over in the Gospel of Matthew. He says just as Jonah is in the belly of the fish for three days and three nights, so will Jesus be in the belly of the earth for three days and three nights. So, just like Jonah died and went to Sheol for three days, so too will Jesus die, be buried, and be resurrected. Jesus is pointing back to the story of Jonah and he sees himself in that story.

But God, in Jonah's day, was looking forward and saying, "This will be a sign to the people of what I'm going to do with my son one day. And it will be a picture to them of what it is I'm going to do. And I will take Jonah's not very good idea and story and flip it because I have a very good idea and a very good plan." Maybe that prayer in Jonah was prayed as he was going under and Jaws was getting him and God rescued him at that point and made him wait alive for three days, but I don't think that makes a whole lot of sense. Which brings me to question number five.

## 5. Why did a big fish swallow Jonah?

God could have done this any way he wanted, right? He could have sent a falcon to fly down and grab him; it would have been more efficient. Because when you study the map, this whale had to go around Africa which would have taken three full days, right? He could have flown him there; he could have transported him there. You remember Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch. He's one place then, boom, he's somewhere else. God could have done this any way he wanted; why a fish?

I don't know, but I'm working on a series coming out of this on fishing themes in the Bible. I don't know what we'll call it. Maybe *Go Fish*. But in the Bible, there is a big theme that runs all the way through scripture about fish. In fact, the only miracle that's recorded in the gospel, that Jesus did twice, was feed the multitudes. Both times, he did it with fish.

And there's a symbol that, for thousands of years, has been used for the church and for Christians and followers of Jesus. It's a fish. It's called the ichthys. The story is told that when tribulation was upon the church, you would indicate to someone else that you were a Christian by taking your foot and just kind of making a little half circle in the sand with somebody that you're talking to. And if the other person was a believer and knew the sign, they would put their foot at the point of your half circle and they would make a half circle their way, which made a fish in the sand to say, "Hey, we're followers of Jesus."

There's a passage where Jesus had a conversation with Peter who he called out of fishing and said, "If you follow me, Peter, I'm going to make you a fisher, not just of fish, but of men." Which is, by the way, the same declaration that Jesus has over you and me today. If we follow Jesus, he will make us not just fishers of fish, he will make us fishers of men. You say, "Well, I'm not yet a fisher of men." Maybe you're not following. Or maybe you haven't followed long enough. But, according to Jesus, if you follow long enough, he will use you to be a fisher of men, which is a great indication of whether or not we're following. So, I don't know why he used a fish, but there is some theme through there.

Jonah is riding in the belly, in these stomach acids, for three days... And if you're hand dissolves or not... I don't know if Doug Johnson is right, but what I'll tell you is certainly it would bleach your skin and it would bleach your hair and you would smell like fish. And the most interesting thing about fish is that when we order it at a restaurant, we ask, "Is it fishy?" It's fish; of course it's fishy, right? And, "Do you smell fish...?" Everything we want about fish is for it not to be fish. We don't want it to taste like fish, we don't want it to smell like fish. We should just order chicken. But, it's smelly and it's stinky and it's awful.

So, Jonah has been bleached white, his hair has been bleached white. He's covered in seaweed and he's smelly and stinky. I have asked this question in my mind a dozen times as I've read this book of the Bible. What on earth were those Ninevites thinking when this fish comes out of the water and spits this man out on the shore? A Marine told me after the first service, "Do you know that he was the first recorded Marine? I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "First amphibious land delivery of all time."

What on earth are those Ninevites thinking when this fish comes up on the shore and burps out this ghostly figure that had to stink. I think the Bible indicates what they were thinking. Look at the very first chapter of Jonah. ***4 But the Lord hurled a powerful wind over the sea, causing a violent storm...*** I don't know if you watched the storm last night. I watched from the balcony of the Chateau last night. I wished I had a good camera to capture and time lapse the lightning coming down. It was beautiful, this violent thing that was happening. ***...that threatened to break the ship apart.***

***5 Fearing for their lives, the desperate sailors shouted to their gods...*** Little g. ***...for help and threw the cargo overboard to lighten the ship.*** Now here's the question that inquiring minds and ADD kids want to know. What gods? What gods are they crying out to in that moment? In all the pantheon of gods in the world at that time, in the myriad of little g gods, who are they crying out to? I think I figured it out. I think they were crying out to the Philistine god Dagon. Why would I think that or guess that? Here's the reason. Dagon was the god of the sea. You're on the sea, a violent storm is coming, who are you going to cry out to. You're going to cry to the one you believe can handle the sea, their god Dagon. He's depicted as half man and half fish.

So, back to my question, what on earth the Ninevites thinking? I think they're thinking *here came Dagon*. The fish jumps up, spits out this ghostly, fishy, stinky man and he comes walking up. They had to think *Dagon is here, and he's got a word for us. Our god has a word for us; let's listen to what Dagon has to say.* And Jonah tells them not about Dagon, but about the true God and they had to think in that moment *if this is not Dagon, he's bigger than Dagon, and whoever he's talking about is much bigger than Dagon. We better listen to what this prophet has to say.* Then Jonah starts talking to them about God and, by the way, he used this guy who is greater to indicate that our God, in the name of Jesus, is better.

I want to declare to you today, in 2019, whatever you're trying to fill your well with, Jesus is better. He's still better. The options may have gotten better, but Jesus is still better. And he will always be better. By the way, you and I don't get a choice in the matter about whether or not we will worship. We're going to worship. Everybody worships. All the time, everybody worships. Atheists and agnostics worship. The only choice they get, and you and I get, is who or what will we worship?

By the way, if you worship money, your whole life, no matter how much you amass, it will never be enough. It will never feel like enough and it will never satisfy you. If you worship beauty, no matter how beautiful you are, you will never feel truly beautiful because it will leave you wanting and leave you unfulfilled. If you worship status, you will never feel significant in your whole lifetime. The truth is they all will leave you wanting.



By the way, Jesus does the very same thing in this weird way. He fulfills you, but then he leaves you wanting more of him all the days of your life so that you will chase after him with everything you've got.

So, here's Jonah, along for the ride. He disobeyed God, ran away, and God says, "I'm still going to use you," which makes you wonder why he ran.

## 6. Why did Jonah disobey?

We give Jonah a really hard time for disobeying. Did he know better. Surely, he knew better, he's a prophet of God. Why did he disobey. There has to be a good reason and I think I have figured out what the good reason is. Do you remember who he was a prophet for? Anybody remember? Jeroboam II for the Nation of Israel. In that day, the Nation of Israel was at war with a place called Assyria. Assyria's capital is Nineveh. So, here comes God to his prophet saying, "If you don't go tell them to repent, I'm going to destroy them. I will destroy their government. I will destroy their military. I will destroy everything about them," to which Jonah had to think, *Good. Praise God. I've been praying for a long time, God, for you to destroy them. Thank you. All I have to do is go the opposite direction and you will get them.*

Now, let me just try to illustrate this for you. You're a businessman and you're in competition with some other businessmen and you know something about them that's going to take them out. Are you making that call? "Hey, I know we're competitors, but the IRS is coming; you better pay attention." You're probably not going to make that call.

Let me just make it a little bit more benign. You're a coach and you've studied the film of the first team that you're going to play this fall and you have found major holes in their defense. Are you calling him this summer and saying, "Hey, here's some things you ought to work on because we're going to take advantage of that"? Or are you going to just exploit it.

Let me make it a little more benign and a little more relevant. You're a single adult in a community group of single adults in your church and you have finally found the girl. She loves Jesus, you met her at church, and she's attractive. All of the sudden you're interested, but there's another guy in the community group who is also interested. After church, you're all at a pool party and he's eating spinach artichoke dip and he has a big piece in his front teeth. Are you saying something?

This is how this is playing out and Jonah is thinking, *I don't want to tell them.* By the way, even when he has no choice in the matter, he's spit out on the shore by the fish and he doesn't even do the whole job. The Bible tells us that Nineveh, at that time, was the largest city in the world. It was a three day's journey walk across the city to get from one side to the other side and he wasn't there three days. We know that from the Bible. So, he didn't even do the whole job. He didn't even tell all the people. He just told some of the people. In fact, when you read the sermon that Jonah preached, it's one sentence. There are no object lessons, no illustrations, no humor to draw the people in. He doesn't even give an invitation or a response time. He grabs the microphone and says, "You better repent or God's going to get you," drops the mic, and walks off. And, lo and behold, they did. They repented. And God met them where they were.

Jonah thought he knew some things about God, but he was wrong. He learned some big lessons. One of the lessons... I don't have time for all of them, but I'll just give you one of them. One of the lessons he learned that day about God is that God loves the whole world.

Two weeks ago, I was in Amman, Jordan. We have a campus in Egypt. Which, I don't know if you know this or not, but you all are supporting now financially. You made a one-time big gift of \$10,000.00 to TC Egypt and TC Jordan, and I say thank you. God's using you and your generosity to impact people around the world. It was a joy for me to sit with one of your elders, Doug Goodwin, in the Middle East a few months ago.

I'm at TC Jordan, which we started one year ago this month. By the way, because of your contributions, last year, our people at TC Egypt led 3,000 people to Jesus. TC Jordan is one year old this month. They run 750 people; one year old, outside of a refugee camp that these people can't get into the refugee camp. So, it's made up of almost all refugees, Iraqi and Syrian refugees.

Two weeks ago, I'm preaching at TC Jordan and using a translator. That's a nerve-racking experience, especially for ADD people because it was way too much time for my brain to run while he's putting it in their language. My brain ran while he was doing that.

Ted was there... he wasn't in Egypt with me, but we were on the same time zone, so he was texting me all the time. Every night, here's some more questions. These Christians pastors are asking me, "What do I do with my six wives now that I have come to know Christ?" Did Ted tell you about this stuff? It's amazing. A little bit different question than "Which pontoon boat should I buy?" Right?

When you're using a translator, it takes some practice actually. I went off on Jonah because I had been studying Jonah. I wasn't preaching on Jonah; I just went off on this one sentence and I made the point I made to you earlier. I said, "In fact, you need to know that archeologists, in our lifetime, have discovered ancient Nineveh in Mosul." When I said that, 30 different ladies... By the way, it's fascinating to watch ladies who are fully covered and culturally Muslim sing praise songs to Jesus. Thirty ladies, from all of the audience, raised their hand.

I looked at the translator and asked, "Why are they raising their hands?"

He said, "Just ignore it and we'll deal with it later."

I said, "That ain't gonna happen. I gotta know why right now because I have to know which way to go."

He said, "We'll deal with it later."

I said, "No, no, no, no. Ask them why they are raising their hands."

He said, "Let's move on."

I said, "Do what I said!" So, he asked them.

With tears coming down their cheeks, they said, "Did you say Mosul?" I said I did. They said, "That's our home." I didn't see this coming. I'm a veteran in the Middle East and I did not see this coming.

They raised their hands again. The translator said, "Move on."

I said, "Ask them!"

They said, "Does that mean that God loves our home?"

I said, "That's exactly what it means. God sent a prophet from the enemy country into your home to tell those people about Jesus and about the true God. And in that day, he did that because he loves your home and today, he sent a redneck, half Egyptian preacher from Tulsa, Oklahoma, funded by an even more redneck church in Branson, Missouri, to come into Jordan, Amman, to tell you today that he still loves you, he still loves your home, and he has a purpose and a plan for you."

I've written this down and I want you to ponder it. I think that Jonah clearly saw the plan of God in the ship and in the fish, but I also think Jonah had a really hard time seeing the plan of God in Nineveh because of his biases. And Jesus says in Matthew 12: 41 "Now someone greater than Jonah is here." Someone greater than Jonah who did something greater than Jonah. Who somehow his death was greater. And he's more than a prophet; he fulfilled all prophetic hope. He's more than a prophecy; he is the prophecy.

Jesus knew that this prophecy would lead to a trial that would be unjust and unfair and he knew that unjust and unfair trial would lead to condemnation and crucifixion. He knew that he would be flogged and beaten. He knew that he would drag an eight-foot cross through the streets of Jerusalem to a place called Golgotha, where he would be nailed onto that cross and eventually breathe his last. He would be laid in a tomb for three days and three nights. He knew that's where this prophecy would lead and yet he spoke it anyway because he loves you and loves me and he loves the whole world.

Maybe you're here today and you don't know Jesus and today will be the day of salvation for you. But most of you probably already do know Jesus and I want you to hear the message of God for you today. He loves the whole world. Racism is a big, big deal. It still exists. Can I just say, as a Middle Eastern who was raised in Louisiana as the only one, it was a big deal when I was a child? I've lived through it. You heard my best friend in the world, David Nassar, last week who is preaching at my church today. He told you about his childhood and ignorant racism. I experienced the very same thing in Louisiana and him in Alabama.

People ask me all the time why I don't speak Arabic. You didn't teach your kid Arabic in the 70s in Louisiana for protection. Somebody posted my sixth-grade class picture on Facebook a few weeks ago. I put it on Facebook and said, "Can anybody guess which one I am?" Several people said, "It would be much harder if there were any diversity in that class." I was the diversity. I was every race for my ignorant, racist friends. Whatever they wanted me to be, right? I was Gyro when they thought I was

Greek. I was Dreidel when they thought I was Jewish. Then they found out I was Middle Eastern. Those names actually scarred me. As your friend and family and now teaching pastor, can I just love you enough to tell you the truth? It's still an issue in our world. I just want to communicate the heart of God to you. He loves the whole world. And he wants to use us to fish for men and women and boys and girls. If you will follow him, he will use you in that way.

Father, today, in this place, we tell you that we love you. We ask you today to speak by the Holy Spirit. Father, you know there are things I wanted to say and haven't had time to say. We're out of time, but Holy Spirit, I pray that you would finish this message in the hearts of your kids.

Today, you you're here and you've never trusted Jesus as Lord and Savior, could I just lead you in a prayer right now, helping you do just that? Just under your breath, right where your standing or watching on the internet today, would you just pray and say, "Dear God, I know I'm a sinner. Today, I ask you to forgive me for all of my sin. Jesus, come into my life to be my Lord and my Savior. In the best way that I know how, I turn my back on my sin and I trust you alone to save me and I want to thank you for saving me.

For those of you who already know Christ, would you just receive his heart calling you to be the hands and the feet, the hug and the love, the mouthpiece of the gospel to the whole world.

In Jesus name we pray, and together we all say... Amen.