

Pastor Spence Shelton
When God's Plan Conflicts With Yours

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Series: Preach
Jonah 4

BIG IDEA – WHEN GOD CALLS, SAY YES

Oh my goodness. Happy Father's Day, dads. I was not ready to be crying over there before getting up here. Can we celebrate the dads who are here with us today and say "Happy Father's Day" to our dads? Man, I don't think anything beats stories like that. I'll tell you, dads, in a two-parent home, statistics will tell us if the dad does not go to church, one out of every 50 kids will actually go to church when they grow up.

But if the dad *does* go to church and leads their family into church, that number jumps all the way to 38 out of 50. They will follow the Lord and walk with Christ when they grow up. In other words, showing up matters. Leading your families here today, even if you had to fight to do it. If you have little ones you had to get dressed and all that kind of stuff... It matters. The Lord is going to bless that. Happy Father's Day.

I had a couple of thoughts as we were watching that. I was like, "Man, there's not going to be a dry eye in the place," and the other thought was "They have no idea who I am." So, let me introduce myself for a second. My name is Spence Shelton. I serve as the lead pastor of a church called *Mercy Church* down in Charlotte, North Carolina. We planted back in 2015.

I'm a Greensboro native. I went to the Triangle, went to Chapel Hill for college, and then down to Charlotte I went. We planted just a year before Two Cities Church, and your pastor, Pastor Kyle, is a dear friend of mine. You probably don't know this, but our churches have been growing up together.

He and I have been talking back and forth for years. We hang out together and work together on ministry problems. Also, we've been hearing down there about what God is doing here, and it is a joy to get to see firsthand the incredible work God is doing here. I'm so thankful to be here.

With all that said, let's get our Bibles out and get to work. All right? If you have your Bibles, Jonah, chapter 4, is where we're going to be. As you're getting there, did you guys see this trend on social media at the start of 2026 where everybody was posting pictures from 10 years prior...2016 pictures?

I don't know if we thought life was easier back in 2016 until we were reminiscing, or whatever, but we were posting pictures from 2016, looking back. I thought about it going, "Man, in 2016, our church was just getting started. Our family was so young." Here's a little shot of this young family we had. I mean, we had little kids. Oh man! Something about me misses those days.

This is our family now. They're bigger and everything. They're the same height as me, and basketball games in the driveway are vicious now. It used to be fun. I miss some of the things back then. I *don't* miss *Doc McStuffins*. We wore that show out, and I'm glad it's gone. I'm thankful we missed the *Bluey* phase. I'm very thankful we didn't hit that, but I miss *Lightning McQueen* and *Mater*. I mean, what films, you know.

We had a pretty hard... That was the time when we were just planting. I look back on that, and I think we did some things great. Some things were really hard. We planted our church in a Jewish senior citizen activity center. Just so you know, you can plant a church anywhere. The problem was that thing smelled awful every Sunday we got there, because there was somebody cooking with a whole lot of garlic every morning in the kitchen.

My wife Courtney at the time was running with the essential oil crowd like she was an oil tycoon. So, what we would do is I would send her texts like *this* pretty much every Sunday: "Please bring one of those diffusers, because the whole place smells like jambalaya and beef stew. It's awful." When I think of looking back, that's what I think of: those early days of planting. It was some hard stuff.

Believe me, Kyle has seen many of those things as he and I were talking about our early days. I say that because I think that idea of the looking back post will actually help you understand the book of Jonah and our main idea today. Most scholars believe the prophet Jonah wrote the book of Jonah as his looking back post, his looking back and reflecting on his own stubbornness in the moment and also on God's immense grace and God's heart for the peoples of the world.

The long and short of it is... If you're kind of new to the Bible, Jonah is this kind of unique book where... I mean, it's named after a guy you don't want to be like, at least in the course of the text. You have plenty of Old Testament heroes whose faith you want to emulate. I want to be like Daniel, like Esther, but Jonah? Nope. Not so much. Why? Because the long and short of it is when God called Jonah into the very purpose he created Jonah for...

We believe God creates each one of us with a specific purpose he has formed before the foundation of the world. Ephesians 2:10 says he has created you for good works that you should walk in. Well, when it comes to Jonah, God says, "Jonah, here's that calling," and Jonah goes, "No. I don't think so." Why? Because God's plan collided with Jonah's plan in a way that Jonah didn't like.

What we're going to see is when those two plans collided, Jonah chose what Jonah wanted, not what God wanted. He was more submitted to Jonah's plan than he was to God's plan. Like many of us, Jonah was good with God's plan, in theory, until it started to rub up against *his* plan.

Jonah was an Israelite. Jonah knew God. Jonah knew all the lingo, just like many of us have been around church and know the things of church and the things of faith, but when God said to Jonah, "Go to your enemies, the very people who have been attacking you, and preach," Jonah said, "No. No, no, no. I'm not going to do that."

Today, what we'll see is at the end of Jonah, after God brings him back, Jonah still has a heart of resistance to God, yet we have this book. We have the book of Jonah. If Jonah never has a heart change somewhere in his life, we don't have the book of Jonah. He's not angrily writing the book of Jonah somewhere. You know what I mean? No. The reason is it's a retrospective memoir.

An older Jonah has now been warmed up in his heart to the grace and love of God, and he's warning all of us. "Don't be like Jonah. When God does call, say yes." That's Jonah's plea through this writing: "When God calls, say yes." That's our main idea, our main takeaway for today from the whole book of Jonah.

I tell our church regularly, "If you will give God one year of your life, you will be amazed at the work he will do in that year that will actually bear fruit for the rest of your life." Give him just one year. Here at the middle of this year, here on Father's Day...dads, you'd better believe I'm talking to you...give God the rest of this year in your parenting, in your marriage, in your work, just the rest of this year, and see what God might do if you say yes. It is not too late.

The main point from Jonah, chapter 4, the thing I want you to walk away with today, the thing we're going to take some time to put into practice at the end of this message... The main idea is simply a prayer: "God, I'm saying yes. God, when you call, however you call, whatever you call, I'm saying yes." That's the takeaway.

Now, along the way, I'll show you what might be obvious. I imagine many of you are like, "Yeah, man. If God tells you to do something, you should do it." Yet so often we don't. You look right in the pages of Scripture. So often we don't. Why don't we? We'll talk about that as we go through it.

So, let's start. Chapter 4, verse 1. We'll work our way through it. Are you guys ready? Sorry. You don't go to my church. We get excited about the Word of God, and I know you guys actually do that. One of the ways I tend to prompt that in our church is I'm like, "Hey, are you guys ready? Because the Bible is coming at you." It's like, "Yeah, we're ready!" If you can cheer for the Panthers, you can definitely cheer for the Word of God. Anyway, here we go. Are you ready? All right.

Chapter 4, verse 1: ***"Jonah was greatly displeased and became furious."*** Okay. Let me stop right there. I have to make sure you understand if you've never read Jonah. In chapter 3, God brought revival to the city of Nineveh. They were the vilest scumbags on the earth. Yet, through Jonah's rather unimpressive sermon, we'll see in a little bit, God brings the whole kingdom to repentance.

These were Jonah's enemies, and Jonah's enemies are now getting the grace of God? Jonah is not happy. So, verse 1 says he was greatly displeased and became furious. I want to make sure you understand that emotion, so I went ahead and translated the Hebrew of verse 1 to each generation's dialect that's sitting in here at any of our campuses today.

For you Boomers, what this is saying is Jonah was fed up and wanted to speak to a manager. For you Gen Xers, it's a little bit different. Jonah can't believe the bad guys get a participation trophy. Now, for those of you who are the Millennials, Jonah was triggered and he was spiraling. Lastly, for Gen Z and Gen Alpha, Jonah began to crash out. That's what's going on here. Okay? Now that everybody has a good handle on what's happening, Jonah tells us why he's so upset. Why is he so upset? Look.

"He prayed to the LORD, 'Please, LORD, isn't this what I said while I was still in my own country? That's why I fled toward Tarshish in the first place. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger, abounding in faithful love, and one who relents from sending disaster. And now, LORD, take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live.' The LORD asked, 'Is it right for you to be angry?'"

Look at Jonah, so angry. "It's better for me to die right now than to live in *this*." God had sent Jonah with a message over to Nineveh. I'll read you the entire sermon Jonah preached. Are you ready? I memorized it for you. ***"In forty days Nineveh will be demolished!"*** That's the whole sermon. ***"In forty days Nineveh will be demolished!"*** Not exactly the Sermon on the Mount. Right?

The thing is Jonah preaches that one line, and he wants it to be true, doesn't he? Those are his enemies. "They're going to be demolished. Yes!" Yet Jonah knew God, and he knew his character, and he knew 40 days was just too long. God was going to

do something in those 40 days. After all, God is a gracious, compassionate God. He knew the character of God.

Initially, when God had first called him, Jonah ran the other way and said no, because Jonah had not come to a place in his heart where he really believed God's plan was the best plan. The same thing is true for us. Why do we say no to God? We say no to God because, deep down, we're not convinced his way is actually better than our way. Somewhere deep down, we're still not convinced of it.

Jonah knew the character of God, and knowing the character of God, because it was calling him to something he didn't like, caused him to be angry, defiant, and not submissive. Maybe that's you. Maybe you're considering something you know God is calling you to, like forgiving somebody who has wronged you. I sit up here and talk about and celebrate dads, and maybe your dad is one you're not celebrating.

Maybe your dad is one who was harsh toward you, wronged you, left you. I don't know your story. I know statistically, in a church our size this weekend, there's somebody who's thinking that way. You know the gospel. If you're a follower of Christ, you know what Ephesians 4 tells you. "Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you."

So, you know this gospel message that God forgave you of your sins when you didn't deserve it, and then the application is to go and forgive others, and you're thinking about your dad, and you're like, "I don't want to." Maybe a friend has even said, "Hey, maybe you should pray about that," and you're like, "I don't *want* to pray about it, because I know what God is going to say if I do, and that guy," or "that girl," or whoever... "They don't deserve my forgiveness."

Maybe you're more thinking, "Come on, God. Where's that Old Testament wrath I read about? That's what I really want. After all, they have never apologized. I don't hear an apology. Why should I forgive them?" As if Jesus was waiting for us to repent before he went to the cross.

This is Jonah. "I'm angry because God's plan, God's way, doesn't feel right. It feels like Nineveh is getting let off the hook, and I don't like it." So Jonah runs. That's chapter 1. Here in chapter 4, we see that even though he finally did what God told him to do, he did it reluctantly, probably because...you know the story...he didn't want to go back into the belly of another fish, but he's still mad.

Maybe you're there. Maybe the biggest hurdle for you saying yes to God is you disagree with what his Word says about how to live your life. You don't like it. That's actually understandable and kind of a good self-awareness moment. Maybe to

encourage you, every Christian deals with that, because we have something called *sin nature* in us. That sin nature doesn't like God's way. It pushes against God's way.

Since truth is more easily twisted in our feelings than in our rational thinking, sin nature loves to operate in our feelings. It *loves* to. But hear me, guys. Just because something *feels* wrong doesn't mean it *is* wrong. I'll give you an example...spinach. It always feels wrong...my taste buds...everything else. What feels right is mint chocolate chip ice cream. Every time. It feels right. "This is what heaven will be like" kind of thing. But you tell me which one *is* right. Which one do my doctors tell me is right?

I'll go ahead and tell you. For me, when people wrong me, revenge feels right. It actually feels right. Forgiving them feels like an injustice. "They deserve punishment for what they did." That's how I feel. I feel Jonah here, man. Yet which one *is* right? Which one will actually set me free from my anger? Vengeance won't do it.

Here's a little heart check for you. What if the vilest person on the earth, whoever that is for you... What if God saved them? Would you doubt it? The person your algorithm is shouting against, reinforcing your hate... What if God pierced through that and said, "Oh, I love them"?

This got kind of personal for us. At the end of this last year, we had a young man in Mint Hill, North Carolina, right next door to us... ISIS got to him, and he was planning attacks on Christians. We didn't know if it was going to be on our church or not, but there was a student in our student ministry who was good friends with him and had shared the gospel with him. Then this guy... I mean, especially for that student, it felt like such a betrayal.

Yet the student comes and says, "Man, I feel like I need to forgive him and tell him that if I ever get to see him again." Does that guy deserve forgiveness? No, but neither do you, church. Neither do I. Yet what do I know? God loves sinners and loves to bring them to repentance and went to the cross to pay for the sins of sinners like you and me, not for perfect people.

So, God asked Jonah, "Is it right for you to be angry? If my grace stretches that far, can you handle it?" Is it possible that God's grace could be poured out in such a way that your heart would grow bitter toward God? That's the story of the prodigal son. I don't have time to go into it today. You can go and read it. It's the older brother. The older brother is bitter that the younger brother gets the love of the father. Is there anybody that could be true of for you?

Speaking of that, it continues into the next set of verses. God gives Jonah a little object lesson. Look at verses 5-6. "**Jonah left the city...**" So, he leaves Nineveh. He has

done his job. He's mad about all this great salvation that's happening. ***"...and found a place east of it. He made himself a shelter there and sat in its shade to see what would happen to the city."*** He's still kind of wanting God to destroy it.

Verse 6: ***"Then the LORD God appointed..."*** I want you to catch that word *appointed*. The same wording has been used throughout the four chapters of Jonah. Remember, this is Jonah's looking back post. Writing this a lot later, he's now aware of what happened underneath what happened. "The Lord God appointed."

I say catch that phrase so you'll see the things in your life, what you call *coincidences* or *good fortune*, or whatever, God is actually appointing. He is scheduling things in your life in advance to bring you closer to him and to bring about his purposes in your life. The chief purpose, of course, is to draw you near to himself. God has appointed this moment for us today. Look. He keeps going. Jonah is going to say this a few more times.

"Then the LORD God appointed a plant, and it grew over Jonah to provide shade for his head to rescue him from his trouble. Jonah was greatly pleased with the plant. When dawn came the next day, God appointed a worm that attacked the plant, and it withered. As the sun was rising, God appointed a scorching east wind. The sun beat down on Jonah's head so much that he almost fainted, and he wanted to die."

Now, I know there are some of you asking, "Wait. God appoints suffering?" That's a great question. Here's what I know. I know God is not the author of evil. James tells me that. James tells me he'll never tempt me. Deuteronomy 32 tells me he is perfect in his nature. He is perfectly righteous and true, and all his ways are just. He cannot author evil. Hebrews 12 tells me he disciplines those he loves.

Here's what I'll say. If you're in a season of suffering, it might be God's discipline. It might be spiritual warfare. It may just be the effect of the fallen world. In my experience, godly friends help me discern which one of those it is. Regardless, the point is not running *from* God but running *toward* him. That's what he's trying to get you to do.

I'll give you an example from my life of how the Lord saved me. I was 13 years old over on the west side of Greensboro. I'm at my dad's friend's 40th birthday party, and all of the kids are downstairs. I'm the oldest of the kids who are down there and everything. We're playing basketball, having a good time. We're in this really heated match, and I'm in the middle of it.

I just remember... I grew up in the 90s. My dad went to UNC. I'm a Jordan guy through and through. Okay? So, I get the chance, and I cock that arm back, tongue out. I'm

about to just yam on all of these little 8-year-olds and unashamedly do so. My youngest brother runs underneath me and headbutts me right in the stomach. Not intentionally. He's doing his own thing or whatever.

Anyway, I gasp for air, and as I'm coming down, my front four teeth get caught on the basketball net. Now, I land on my feet, because I'm crazy athletic like that and everything. You know, I'm going to spare you a lot. I know there are some of you going, "How in the world?" The goal was eight feet high, but that's not important to the rest of this. Okay? I recognize some of you are wondering how this is possible.

Long story short, after an emergency visit to the ER and everything... It was a crazy night. It turns out I had broken my top jaw right in half. Like, when we went into the ER, I was looking through my teeth, and you're not supposed to be able to do that, just so you know. That's supposed to be a mirror thing.

Anyway, the doctor comes to me after he puts on these mega braces, which is great for a 13-year-old to have these intense braces. He says, "Well, you're a lucky boy." I'm like, "Bro, I don't think you and I... Maybe you got into the wrong room. I don't think you understand what happened tonight." He goes, "No, no. Usually when this happens..." I'm like, "Has this ever happened in the history of the world?"

He's like, "Yeah. Usually when this happens, what happens is people break their neck and either are paralyzed for life or die right there on the spot." He says, "You're walking out of here with braces." I'm like, "Ha, ha, ha," because I couldn't talk or anything, but I had a new appreciation for what was happening right there.

I say that to say, a few weeks later, Clayton King is preaching Fort Caswell where my church had sent the youth group for the summer, and he says, "Man, if you died tonight, do you know you'd be with Christ?" I had probably heard that prompting before, but it had never been real because I'd never almost died tonight, and now I had this thing.

What felt like suffering... "How, God? Why would you ever do that?" God turned around in his kindness very quickly just a few weeks later and showed me. "It's to wake you up to your need for me and your need for salvation." That's the night I became a follower of Christ.

I don't know what God is doing in your life right now, what season of suffering you're in. I just know it's not useless. I know it's not pointless, and I know it's meant to draw you to himself. That's what God is trying to do with Jonah, but Jonah is stubborn. You know, the verse we just read... This is at least the third time in four chapters he said he wanted to die. He's not happy with the Lord.

He keeps going. End of verse 8: ***"It's better for me to die than to live."*** Verse 9: ***"Then God asked Jonah, 'Is it right for you to be angry about the plant?' 'Yes, it's right!' he replied. 'I'm angry enough to die!'"*** I love God's question to Jonah. "Is it right for you to be angry?" This little dialogue actually happened in verse 4 at the very beginning when Jonah is mad about the awakening and now again. "Is it right? It's clear you're angry, but is your anger right?" Not, "Does it *feel* right for you to be angry?" *Is it right?*

It's so common for me to hear Christians say, "I'm just angry with God." And we quote David from the Psalms. "How long, O Lord?" We can find our way to say, "It's okay to be mad at God." Well, to you and your situation, I just want you to hear God's question: "Is it right?" Is it right for you to be angry at God?

I don't say that lightly, because anger is an intense emotion. Some of you are dealing with intense pain, and God is in control. Bad things have happened. You feel angry. Like I said, the world is broken. Bad things happen that shouldn't. It's right for us to grieve, but blaming God is actually never right. "God, I'm hurting, and I don't understand"? Sure.

But anger, as any counselor will tell you, is a secondary emotion, which means something else underneath it is creating it. Usually that's pain, that's sadness. "God, that person I loved left, and I'm angry." "God, they lied about me, and I'm angry." You're actually hurting. You were betrayed. What if that anger gave way and became a bridge to a deeper communion with God who loves you instead of a ravine that widens your distance to him?

Secondly, I want you to see the grace of God when Jonah crashes out against God. God doesn't backhand slap Jonah to hell, which would be justified. Instead, God gives him a lesson in grace. He met him right where he was, and he'll meet you right where you are. Instead of your pain distancing you, allow God to speak through his Word and through his Holy Spirit and comfort you and draw you close.

Look at verse 10. ***"And the LORD said, 'You cared about the plant, which you did not labor over and did not grow. It appeared in a night and perished in a night.'"*** This is another reason we say no to God and his plan: we forget his mercy toward us. We do it all the time. We struggle to say yes to God in the present because we forget his mercy that he showed in the past.

We struggle to be financially generous in the present because we forget his generosity in the past. We struggle to forgive because we forget how much we've been forgiven. This is the gospel, y'all. We are gospel people. We struggle to take steps of obedience because we forget. "Man, look at how much he provided last time

we did." The gospel tells us so clearly that God will never call us to go farther than he has gone for us.

He loves you, church. I don't know where you are right now in your walk with God and your walk with Christ, if you're observing and checking things out here at the church. Praise God for a church like this where you can come in and sit, learn, and experience it, and it's a church very welcoming to the non-Christian to come and hear about the grace and love of God for you. I know that about your church. I know that to be true.

Listen. The gospel announces that you and I are sinners, which means we've chosen, like Jonah, our way over God's way, but God in his great love for us does not forever send us away from himself because of that. Instead, he makes a way for our sin debt to be paid. Thanks be to God.

He sent his Son up on the cross. Talk about Father's Day. God the Father (it's the most famous verse in Scripture) sent his one and only Son up on the cross for you and me so that those who believe in him might not perish, might not experience the justified wrath for our sin, but instead have eternal life.

I don't know what kind of dad you've had, but I know all earthly fathers... Our job is to point you to that love of the heavenly Father. Man, he loves you. He *loves* you. This leads us right to our last verse. God says to Jonah, ***"So may I not care about the great city of Nineveh, which has more than a hundred twenty thousand people who cannot distinguish between their right and their left, as well as many animals?"*** And that's how it ends.

God says, "You're getting all worked up over a plant, and you had nothing to do with the plant. It's a plant, Jonah. Nineveh is filled with something a lot more valuable than plants. It's filled with people, 120,000-plus, who don't know their right from their left." In other words, that "right from left" is a way of saying they're confused, morally and spiritually blind and confused. The result of that blindness and confusion has been all kinds of evil that Nineveh has committed, generations of evil.

While they deserve wrath...yes, they deserve wrath, Jonah...God doesn't look at them like Jonah does. Jonah condemns, and God says, "No, these are people made in my image. They're made in my image. I made them." God is like, "Bigger picture, Jonah. Is it not right for me to care about my creation? You think it's right to be angry. There's a bigger right going on here...my love for people made in my image, bound for eternity, separated from me."

This is the last reason I'm going to give you today why we don't say yes to God: we don't know God as well as we think we do. Jonah was not only a Jew, which makes

him part of God's chosen people; he's a prophet. If anyone knew God, it should have been him. Certainly, he knew the facts. He knew the facts about his character, but he doesn't seem to know God deeply enough to grieve over sin and rejoice over a sinner's salvation. See the difference?

When someone sins, does it only anger you or does it also grieve you? For God, it does both. The story of the Bible all throughout is a story of sinners finding salvation through the ministry of other sinners who've been saved by grace. Y'all, that's the church. If you think this church is some kind of a stuffy museum for perfect people, I'm telling you...wrong place. This church is filled with a bunch of sinners, and there's room for one more, and that's you. That's what we are.

Hear me. There's room for entire people groups in the kingdom of God too. There's a message to us here in Jonah that even Nineveh is not too far gone for the grace of God. That's the heart of God for all people groups on planet earth. That's why God says in Psalm 67, "**May God be gracious to us...**" You may have heard this prayed over you before. "**...and bless us; may he make his face shine upon us...**"

Churches will quote this at the end of a service often. Throughout church history we've done this. But why? "**...so that your way may be known on earth, your salvation among all nations. Let the peoples praise you, God; let all the peoples praise you.**" Not just let all the people, like all the people of Israel. No. The *peoples* (plural), people groups...all of them...praise you, God.

How's that going to happen? I'm glad you asked, because Jesus tells us how right at the end of Matthew. The Great Commission to the disciples. "**Go, therefore...**" "In light of what you have heard and seen and what I've taught you, what I've done for you; in light of the resurrection... The tomb is empty and I'm here." He's going up.

He says, "**Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations...**" Literal word there: *peoples*. "**...baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit...**" That's our calling. We are spiritual descendants of the ones who were standing on the hillside with Jesus. We're now surrendered to *his* plan, not *our* plan. We're remembering his mercy, not forgetting it.

We're seeing more and more into the majestic character of God, kneeling before the King of Kings, and saying, "God, I'm saying yes. I'm not going to be like Jonah. Jonah has warned me. God has warned me through him. God, I'm saying yes. I'm saying yes to receiving your forgiveness. That's where it starts with you. Here in 2026, I'm saying yes to choosing your way in my work life, in my dating life, in my marriage. I'm saying yes to what it means to be a godly father."

You know, I could sum up biblical manhood. Robert Lewis did it years ago. Go look it up. It's one who, just like Christ, rejects passivity, accepts responsibility, leads courageously, and expects God's greater reward in light of it all. "I'm saying yes today. I'm saying yes to your calling, even in the hard stuff." And I have to emphasize, "I'm saying yes to reaching the lost with the good news of the gospel."

For some of you, that means...no question in my mind here at Two Cities...you're going to say yes to taking the gospel to where it's not known, to the nations. You might have the question, "Am I called?" Yes. The question is not whether you are called. There's no one in this room who can escape Christ's calling of the Great Commission. It's just *where* you are called, *how* you are called.

I love reading missionary biographies. It keeps my focus clear on what we're called to do. One of my favorite ones is about a guy named C.T. Studd, mainly because his name is *Studd*. That's an awesome name for a guy. Anyway, C.T. Studd was this world-class cricket player in Cambridge in the 1870s. In England in the 1870s, this guy achieves Tom Brady-level fame and status. Okay?

Despite this celebrity status, what happened is a missionary by the name of Hudson Taylor came recruiting for Christians to go to China, and C.T. felt, "Oh man. I think God might be calling me to go. My 'yes' to Matthew 28:19 looks like it's China." Y'all, I'm telling you, he was so popular. He was on the national cricket team for England. In fact, the queen of England herself came and said, "Please don't go." But he was like, "God is calling."

Now, interestingly enough, his dad had died about a year before, and he inherited the equivalent of about \$4 million in today's money. He's engaged at the time, and he and his fiancée are talking about how they're going to go to China. He said it was a really convicting moment. He starts to give away this inheritance. He gives away two-thirds of it to ministries. Then his fiancée comes and says, "What did the Lord tell the rich young man to do? Give away *some* or give away *all* and follow him?"

So, he said, "Sell all," and they gave their remaining fortune, the last bit of it, to the Salvation Army so they could start their marriage, as he said, clear with the Lord. The rest of his life, he went on to plant churches and establish mission training hubs across China, India, and the Congo. As he neared death, here's what he wrote in his journal:

"As I believe I am now nearing my departure from this world, I have but a few things to rejoice in; they are these: that God called me to China and I went in spite of utmost opposition from all my loved ones; that I joyfully acted as Christ told that rich young man to act; that I deliberately, at the call of God, when alone on the Bibby liner in 1910, gave up my life for this work, which was to be henceforth not for the Sudan

only but for the whole unevangelized world. My only joys, therefore, are that when God has given me a work to do, I have not refused it."

All I'm doing is putting a little bit of today's language on that prayer, church, and saying maybe *your* prayer, *my* prayer, today needs to be "God, I'm saying yes. I'm hearing Jonah reflect on it, wishing he would have. I'm hearing the blessing of Scripture. I'm hearing the call of God to surrender, not *some* of my life, not *part* of my life, not just the parts that are already congruent with your plan, but my whole life. God, I'm saying yes."

What's that for you? What's the *yes* that, as I'm sitting here talking about obeying God, you're thinking about either the step or the person, the relationship, you know you need to give over to God the Father? "Yes. God, I'm going to step into what it means to be a godly father. I know that's going to be hard, and I don't think I actually have the stuff, and I've got a wake of where I have messed up in the past, but, God, I'm saying yes. I'm trusting your Spirit and your Word, and I'm saying yes."

"God, I've been wrestling with switching careers and going to the mission field. You know that. I'm going to give up so much, and I don't know how this is all going to work out, but I'm trusting your Word, trusting your Spirit, trusting your character, and, God, I'm saying yes." I don't know what your *yes* is, church. We have a way of saying it. Kyle and I and a group of pastors that we're together with say it often. "Put your yes on the table; let God put it on the map." What's your *yes*? Let me pray for you.

Father, I pray for brothers and sisters here who have a very clear *yes* in front of them...a *yes* to forgiving, a *yes* to going and asking for forgiveness, a *yes* to your call to the nations, a *yes* to your call to the person down the hall who needs to hear about the love of Christ...just a neighbor, just a friend, even a family member.

All of our campuses right now, would you...? Maybe you even need to put your hands out in a posture of letting go of your control, of surrendering it to the Lord. The beautiful thing is open hands and open hearts can receive the love of God, who meets you not with judgment and condemnation but with great love.

Maybe you need to receive the love of Christ today. He died for your sins so you don't have to. You don't have to pay that price. You can receive. "God, I'm saying yes to forgiveness. I'm saying yes to new life. Thank you, God, for saving me."

Father, would you show yourself faithful again? We've seen it before. We're asking you to do it again. Would this city be transformed, this community be transformed by the love of God because they see it in the lives of the redeemed here? God, we're saying yes. Amen.