

Text: Jonah 4:10-11

My purpose for this message: If this is God's universe and He's at its center, His priorities for His universe should be ours.

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God's World Revolves Around Him

PRAY.

What crosses the minds of people who are the center of the universe? Listen to *WORLD* columnist Andree Seu from the June 11, 2005 issue:

SEVENTEEN MINUTES

It's the thoughts - ordinary, daily thoughts - that count

THESE ARE THE THOUGHTS OF A WOMAN DRIVING home from the Stop 'N Shop on an ordinary day.

She conjures three comebacks she could've hurled at Ellen if she had not been caught off guard. She spots the baby shower invitation on the dashboard and schemes a way to be out of town that weekend - then thinks better of it because she has a favor to ask the sender at a later date.

She sizes up a woman standing at the bus stop - judges her. She stewes over a comment her brother made behind her back and crafts a letter telling him off - and sounding righteous in the process.

She reviews the morning's argument with her husband, and plans the evening installment. She imagines how life would have been if she had married X (a well-worn furrow, this).

She magnanimously lets a car merge into traffic, and then is ticked off when she doesn't get her wave. She resolves to eat less chocolate starting today - well, tomorrow.

She replays memory tapes going back to the '60s, trying to change the endings. Somebody rides up the road shoulder and budes to the head of a traffic jam, and she hates the driver with a perfect hatred.

She passes the house of the contractor who defrauded her and fantasizes blowing it to smithereens. She passes Audrey working in her garden and waves - but thinks, "If Audrey has chronic fatigue syndrome, I'm a flying Wallenda."

She glares at a driver who runs a red light in front of her, forgetting that she did the same about a mile ago. She checks her slightly crooked nose compulsively in the rearview mirror, and reassures herself it isn't too bad.

An inner voice tells her to turn off the radio and pray, but she decides that's the voice of legalism.

She brainstorms talking points for her upcoming woman's Bible study lectures on "Ephesians" and considers how she can improve it - and make it better than Alice's talk of last week.

She is angry at God because here she is a Christian and broke, while her good-for-nothing heathen of a brother is rolling in dough. She thinks how much better her life would be if she were beautiful, and fantasizes all the bungee-jumping, maggot pizza-eating "fear factor" stunts she'd be willing to subject herself to look like Gwyneth Paltrow.

She wonders how her parents will divvy up the inheritance - and how long she has to wait. She rehearses two good reasons why her sister and not she should take care of the folks when they're too old. She thinks about her childhood and counts that ways her parents have screwed up her life.

*The Johnsons drive by, and she recalls all the meals she made for them 10 years ago when Lydia had toxemia during pregnancy, and bets they don't even remember. Hmm, did they even send a thank-you card? The word treachery flashes through her mind (Mr. Beaver's succinct epithet for Edmund in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*) but leaves no footprints.*

An SUV cuts her off, and she decides to punish it by tailgating. Her heart smites her for this. So she determines to try harder to live righteously from now on. Who knows, God may

reward her in some amazing way: Her husband may give her grounds for divorce, and God will lead her to the arms of Mr. Right.

She tries to pray but doesn't get past "Our Father."

There are lots of other people that the woman does not think of while driving home with groceries, people who are not important to her social status, or just not interesting.

She doesn't think about AIDS-ravaged Africa, she doesn't think about the death sentence dangling over millions in Sudan, she doesn't think about missionaries, she doesn't think about martyrs in Kim Jong-il's prisons, she doesn't think about ways she could encourage her children.

She pulls into her driveway. Total driving time: 17 minutes. And if you were to ask the lady, as she rustles parcels from the car, what she has been thinking about on the drive from town, she would say, "Oh, nothing in particular." And she would not be lying.

Imagine believing that we don't need a Savior.

See yourself in any of that self talk? I do. We are the center of our own universes. But, I am most certainly *not!* ***For from [God] and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever!*** (Romans 11:36).

God is. Not just at the center, He *is* the center. *Therefore*, His agenda matters much more than mine does. Jonah was having trouble with that concept. So God tried to straighten him out. READ Jonah 4:10-11.

Review

God's world revolves around him. Not Jonah, or what he wanted; not me or what I want; not you or what *you* want. God's world revolves around him. Jonah wanted to be in charge and crush the people in Nineveh. Apparently, only he and *his* people were worthy of God's grace. Yet, in 2:8 he admitted that pagans *could* receive God's grace if only they'd give up their idols and sin. Then when the people of Nineveh *did*, he objected. He despised Rom.9:15-16 where God said: ***I will have mercy and compassion on whomever I want to; doesn't depend on man's desire, but my mercy...*** What *I* think matters immeasurably more than what you—whom I created—think.

I don't know if he does it anymore, but Tony Campolo used to interrupt his sermons with a crude expletive. In the stunned silence that followed, he would say something like, "Right now a lot of you are more upset that I said ____ than that tens of thousands of children are dying of AIDS in Africa."

This (vv.10-11) is that—what God said to Jonah; this is that without the crudeness. God observed, "Jonah, you didn't care if those people in Nineveh went to hell—in fact, you wished they would. Yet, you're all in a dither about some short-lived shrub you didn't plant or water. I made these people. Shouldn't they concern me?" The question God's *really* asking is, "Shouldn't they concern *you*?"

Jonah problem was much more than a simple lack of compassion. In his drama there are 3 main parties (if we don't count the fish): Jonah, God, the people of Nineveh. Only one can be at the center of Jonah's universe. He's contesting with God for that spot. Look at something from chapter 1 that John Horst pointed out to me 2 weeks ago. READ v.3: ***But Jonah ran away from the Lord...*** Nineveh was not Jonah's main problem: the Lord was. And when God granted Nineveh mercy, all Jonah's private, unspoken problems with Him came thrashing to the surface.

The \$64 question these 4 chapters ask us is not, are we compassionate or do we *lack* compassion? It's really, whose agenda are we backing: God's or our own? You see, *that's* why it matters who's the center of the universe..., because *whoever* it is, gets to set our agenda. Which is what?

God's agenda/mission

I want to try and burst a bubble or two before we go any further.

1. God's agenda is not simply to get us to stop sinning so much. That certainly matters, it's something that he admonishes us to do in 1 Cor.15:34: *Come back to your senses as you ought, and stop sinning*; But it's not His premier agenda. Or, put perhaps more understandably, it's not His mission.
2. Nor is it to get you to be *nice*. That also matters for we are told to be kind and compassionate to each other, forgiving each other (Eph.4:32). But *this* is not God's mission either.

God's mission is what he sent His one and only Son to planet earth for: GO SAVE THE WORLD. And, now that His Son is back in heaven, we are His foot soldiers, under orders to help Him save it. READ Acts 1:8.

So, Christian, are you? Am I? Are we in some fashion engaged in God's mission? Rick Warren clarifies, *This does not mean you should quit your job to become a fulltime evangelist. God wants you to share the Good News where you are. As a student, mother, preschool teacher, salesman, or manager or whatever you do, you should continually look for people God places in your path with whom you can share the gospel* (Purpose-Driven Life, 284).

Not feverishly. By that I mean, you don't have to tell everyone you meet. Some of you grew up in churches that implied that. But, the Spirit—the agent of conversion—blows wherever *He* wills (Jesus, Jn.3:8). Not everyone you meet is being blown. Indiscriminate evangelism makes *us* feel good, feel like we've done our duty, but it doesn't bear much fruit. Henry Blackaby describes what we should do this way: notice where God's working, then go join him. In other words, pay better attention to what's happening around you spiritually, and when you see evidence of His hand, get in the game.

That's our mission: telling others about Jesus in the natural flow of our lives. But on the other side of this blue and green marble, there are people who don't even know *one* Christian, and will never run into one during their activities. In fact, no Christian—or very few Christians—can even speak their particular group's language. And when you can't communicate, they can't convert. What about *these* folks?

This is the problem for 40% of the world's people. 2 ½ billion people in 6900 different people groups have no way to hear about Jesus Christ—with the possible exception of radio. Many live between the 10th and 40th parallels north of the equator, sometimes called the 10-40 window. Included are 1.3 billion lost Muslims who reject Jesus as the Son of God. They would argue that they believe in one God Allah, but 1 Jn.2:23 says *No one who denies the Son has the Father...*

There are 900 million lost Hindus who believe in many gods but seek salvation through works. Yet Rom.4:5 says that it is not work, but faith in Jesus that God finds acceptable. The 375 million Buddhists in places like Nepal, Laos, Burma and Thailand also seek salvation through works. Some Hindus *and* Buddhists think Jesus was OK, but dismiss Him as a Savior. Yet Jesus said that *No one comes to the Father except through me*. (Jn.14:6)

There are missionaries in some of these areas, but many others are far removed from the light. No Christian has come to their part of the world. No Christian has asked permission to come live with them and learn their language. No Christian has come to eat their food, live in a house like theirs, and no Christian has come to pray for them.

That is about to change. Under the leadership of 3 key house church leaders from China, a Chinese vision of mission work from the 1940's has been revived. The "Back to Jerusalem" movement intends to saturate the old Silk Road with traveling missionaries. This ancient 4000 mile long trade route stretching from eastern China to

Istanbul, Turkey, will be the path it's hoped upwards of 100,000 Chinese missionaries will spread the good news, eventually arriving in the west, in Jerusalem.

Across SE Asia, across India, Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, Turkey. It is believed that as many as 1000 missionaries have already been dispatched. Brother Yun is one of the leaders about whom the book *The Heavenly Man* was written. Combined, he and the other leaders were imprisoned 40 years for the sake of the gospel. He says the Chinese church which is full of sufferers, will do what we westerners cannot; for we're too soft. They will tell about Jesus, willingly accepting the price for doing so in places like Kabul, northern India, Burma, Vientienne, Mecca. This, is the harvest field.

Are there any of us, who will join this and other efforts to spread the good news? I am not ready to concede that we in the west are so soft that we must sit idly by while others do our dirty work. My son has enlisted in the army and leaves in October. He's signed up for 5 years, hoping to make the cut for the special forces, the green berets. We still have men and women of courage. We need some who will take profession they've been trained for, and after gaining some experience stateside, take overseas to restricted countries like Saudi Arabia, Libya, Laos, Uzbekistan, Nepal. Use your engineering, administration, medical, or heavy equipment skills in another country while you make new friends to tell about Jesus.

We need some people who have a knack for languages to join Wycliffe and other works putting the Holy Scriptures in the tongues of the world. We need people who may not be terribly gifted in things like Bible teaching and such but know how to drill a well or show villagers how to irrigate or preserve seed; and who know the simple gospel.

We need some people who will stir up conventional mission agencies, pushing and prodding until they withdraw from old, stale fields and attack the frontiers. The job is still big; the need still great; the resources: MANY. And the mission of God, still unchanged. Has been, for 2000 years. Would you go if He called? Would I *know* if He called?

Concl:

Some 12 Step wag has said, "I may not be much, but I'm all I think about." I think often about home remodeling projects I'd like to do; I scheme and plan a lot about how to pay my house off in 20 years instead of 30. I think about when to start watering the yard, I anticipate enjoying a vacation; spending time with extended family; enjoying a good meal; hunting; the schedule for the daily bike ride. You fill in your own blanks with these and many other morally neutral items that grip our thinking. But the question I'd like us to leave churning in our hearts is, "Are we on *His* mission?" Will we exert any effort, pray any prayer, spend any money, take any step to disturb our natural preoccupation with ourselves?

Let me ask you to take a small step of involvement in God's mission this morning: if He's the center of the universe, this will be not only good for Him and His mission, but us as well. Go to the "Joshua Project" website and either individually or as a family, adopt an unreached people group. Pick any country you might be interested in, prayerfully select a people, then read all about their religion, language, customs, location, and needs. Then start praying every day for people like the Tabassarians in Kazakhstan.

2 Cor.5:15 says *He died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves* [no longer the center of their own universe], *but for him who died for them, and was raised again.*