



ATAPAT-Part 2
Our Struggle to Say “Any Place”
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Well, it's been my habit with my three kids that when I leave, I give them a little pep talk. Do your parents do that? Mine's gotten really short. It's very brief, but I look in the eyes of my two teenage boys, my preteen daughter, and I say, especially when I leave them home alone, I say, do right. You'd better do the right thing. Do the right thing when I'm gone. I give them that.

Well, recently, I've added a new dimension to my little departing exhortation, because, you see, I've downloaded this app that shows me where all my kids are, their phones. It tracks their phones. So I know where they are at any given time. So I've realized in doing that that I care not only about what they do, I'm really caring a lot about where they are, it seems, lately. Because I realize they can be just about anywhere.

I can tell my son, for instance, hey, I'm leaving and you watch after your sister and be sure you take care of her, and then I leave. Well, I can check in a couple hours later on the app and if I see his little icon, like, going down the I-5 towards San Diego, I'm going to give him a call and I'm going to say, what are you doing? And he might say to me, well, I'm doing what you told me to do. I'm watching my little sister. Your daughter's right here next to me. To which I would retort, well, that's great, but that's not where I wanted you to watch your little sister. You know, in Tijuana or wherever you're headed right now. I prefer you watch her in Orange County.

I care about not only what they do, I care about where they are.

Well, this is important and not often preached on, but you need to understand this about God's parental concern in your life. He cares not only about what you do in your life, he cares about where it is that you do those things. That's very important for us to catch. The Bible has a lot to say about that, and we often overlook it. We need to understand God's concern, not only about what you do, but where you do those things.

Oh, by the way, I've noticed this. This app is really good for parents. I'm not so sure it's great for my kids, because they can track where mom and dad are all the time, which, you know, it's not that I'm going anywhere I shouldn't go. It's none of that. It's just that they know when they see our little icon tracking toward the house, they know when we're coming home. And I'm not sure I like that. I'd prefer they not know when I'm coming home. Because if they're doing the right thing, I want them to be doing the right thing regardless of whether I'm coming home or not.



Now, speaking of God's parental concern, Jesus didn't give us that advantage, did he? He made that crystal clear over and over and over again. You will not know when I come back. I think about the parable he told there in Luke 12. He said, listen, the real important thing is that I find you doing my will when I return. That's what I want you to be doing. And you won't know when I'm coming back.

See, so here's the thing. If we knew he was coming back in 2024, we could all scurry like immature children to get to our post because they're coming down the street. Here comes God. But we don't have that advantage. The point of his imminent return is that you and I are doing what he wants us to do where he wants us to do it right now. This is an urgent thing.

We need to consider that in our Christian life and it's not just something we consider, as you know, 22-year-old Christians. I don't care if you're 72. You need to be making the decision in your own heart to look to the Lord of life and say, I'm willing to do anything you ask me to do and I'm willing to do it in any place, no matter where that might be. I want to make sure I'm found doing that.

And if you're new to all this and that sounds like, man, your God is sure a control, you know, sure is a control freak. You want to make sure everybody's in their place and all that. Listen, this is for good. Not only the master plan of what God is doing, but you do understand this is good for us. Just to reprise a bit of the theme of Luke 12 that I was quoting earlier, here's what he said, blessed is the one whom the master finds doing so when he returns.

See, if we're doing his will when he returns, there is a kind of blessing that he has promised to us that's going to outshine and overshadow any kind of sacrifice we may make. As we said last time we were dealing with this topic, it is important to understand that while it may feel like we're losing our life, it's not until we do that for Christ's sake that we actually find it.

This is a blessing for us. This is important, not only for the good of the kingdom and the kingdom work, it's good for you to be nimble and mobile and ready to move anywhere and do anything God asks you to do because it is a blessing in your life.

And some of you know that. You recognize that. You understand that you may be busy doing something that you know God wants you to do, whether you're an architect or a dentist or an



accountant or a homemaker, whatever your job is, but you've sensed at times in your Christian life, you know what, I don't know that I'm doing this in the right place.

One of the problems with us not being willing to go where God would have us go is because we've learned to like where we are. And that's a mild word, by the way, and I'm a little concerned that it's more than like for some of us. It could actually be what the Bible calls idolatry. And that's a grievous sin, and it's a problem.

And I want to make sure, number one, if you jot this down in your worksheet, that you and I never idolize a place. I don't want to ever idolize a place.

And once you jot that down, I want you to take your Bibles and turn with me to Luke chapter 9. The bottom of chapter 9 of Luke. Luke chapter 9, and I want to show you that there's all kinds of geographic idolatry that goes on in our hearts. Sometimes it's subtle and it is hard to depict.

Let me show you three kinds of geographic idolatry that takes place in our hearts. Sometimes when we're thinking that we're saying to God, everything's on the table. I'll do anything, ATAPAT, anything, any place, I'll do it. And in reality, if Jesus were here, he might just penetrate through those words and get to a place where we recognize that's not really what we mean.

Take a look at this beginning in verse 57, Luke chapter 9, verse 57. Sounds great. Right out of the gate. They were going along the road, Jesus and his disciples. And someone said to him, said to Christ, I will follow you—now underline this—wherever you go. You're the shepherd. You're the king. If you want me here, you want me there, I'll go. I will do it wherever. That's a great big word. And it sounds really good coming out of his mouth. And I'm sure, you know, Thomas and Philip and Nathaniel and Peter, oh, this guy's great. He's ready to go wherever the Lord leads him. That's awesome.

Jesus recognized that he had a kind of geographic idolatry. Let's call this first one a kind of idolatry about a kind of place. Sometimes we idolize a kind of place, a type of place. It's not a specific place. It's a kind of place. And Jesus is going to say, it sounds to me like you're willing to follow me wherever I go, but I don't think you've included really every kind of place.

You know, and for a lot of us, we're here today saying, well, I'll follow Christ wherever he leads me. I'm out of college or I have this career, I got my family. You want to send me to Charlotte, fine.



You want to send me to Cincinnati, great. Well, that's fine. Irvine, yeah, I'm in for Irvine. But we really don't have everything on the table. I mean, Madras? No. Shanghai? No. Not interested. Agenda wheel? Nah, that's not for me.

Everything needs to be on the table, even if that place is out of the boundaries of what you consider comfortable. Verse 58, Jesus says to that man, I don't know that you really mean everything, do you? Foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.

I'm itinerant. I'm going to move from here, I'm going to move to there. I'm going to move from here, I'm going to move to there. If you're willing to follow me right now in this first-century mission, you're not going to have a home.

He may have in his heart been saying, hey, you want to take me to Capernaum? Great. I'll go to Capernaum. I'll live in Capernaum. It's kind of nice there. Not far from the Sea of Galilee. I'm willing to go. Oh, you want to take me down south? I love Judea in the springtime. Bethlehem, I'm up for that. Fantastic. No problem.

Foxes have holes. Both then and now, these foxes are real good about digging out their dens, usually at a 45-degree angle, depending on whether it's a slope or a flat ground. And they usually go on average about five feet deep. Think about that now. Even in the heat or whatever the environment might be, they've got a nice comfy place. And these dens go back many feet, some as long as 50 feet. On average, about 10, 15 feet long, these dens are. And they kind of hollow out this little place, this little pod for themselves under the ground, and they live there.

Now, these foxes don't live that long out in the wild, five, seven, eight years maybe. But these dens that they build, I mean, depending on where they build them and whether there's root structures, they last for years, for decades. I mean, literally the den outlives the fox. I mean, they're handing down the keys to the den to their kids, you know, and their grandkids. These are amazing things that these foxes do to find this little place to hole up. And by the way, not a bad life. They sleep about nine and a half hours a day, these foxes, in their cozy little dens where they hang out and raise their families.

He says, you know what? You might want to kind of settle down and serve the Lord somewhere, but it may not be that way for you. As a matter of fact, you need to say it may be a place that doesn't have that kind of security or that comfort or the convenience of even a foxhole.



Birds of the air have nests. I'm glad he used that example because we've even brought that down into our language to speak of a kind of nesting instinct that we have. It's very convenient for us in our own thinking to think, especially when we have kids, I need to have a real protected place to raise my young. That's why the birds build nests. I want a nice, safe place.

And even in, you know, suburban areas like ours, you'll find these nests. They're built in every little nook and cranny, in a sign, in a corner, somewhere, wherever it is, in some rafter of some public thing. There they are building their nest. Why? Because they want a nice, comfortable, safe, secure place to raise their young.

There are some moms right here in this room. They claim Christ. They say to Christ, well, wherever you want to take me. But in reality, in their hearts, there's this little carved-out piece where they say, but right now with my kids, if it was a place outside what I would see as a secure place and a comfortable place for the development of my children, I'm not. No, I'm not going to go. I can't go there.

Be careful. If Christ is the king, if he's one that we're really saying our hearts are ATAPAT, anything, any place, then we've got to be able to say, even if that's kind of outside the bounds of the category that I think I want to live in.

There are some people making moves all the time in their Christian lives just because of the comforts of what they think they can get if they move from here to there. You know, the housing market there is a lot better. I can get a lot bigger house. I can get a yard. It'd be real nice. Then I can use it for ministry. I get a big five-bedroom house and have Bible studies in the front room. It'll be great. Serve the Lord there. Can't afford much here.

Never idolize a place, even if it's a kind of place. It might be the stage of your life. It may be your upbringing. It may be what you expect to live in because of your conditioning, your culture. You need to be able to say to Christ, any place. I will never idolize a place, even if it's a kind or a type or a category of place.

Secondly, it is easy for us to idolize a specific place, a place we call home, a place we consider to be, that's my town. I mean, I might leave it temporarily, but that's always going to be my home.



Drop down, if you would, verse 61 in Luke 9. Another person comes to Christ and says, I will follow you, Lord. Lord, you're in charge. I'll go with you, but let me first say farewell to those at my home.

Now this may sound very nuanced because here is someone willing to leave his home, and yet Jesus speaks to the heart because you're never really going to have that experience of following the great shepherd in your life unless you're willing to recognize that that place can't mean that much to you.

As a matter of fact, he puts it this way in the next verse. No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.

What are you talking about? Now, if you've been around here at Compass, you understand some of the basics of the New Testament. It was written originally in Greek, Koine Greek, which is a highly inflected, very specific language. Even the tenses of every verb are much more broken down than they are in English. We have past, present, and future. They have all of these five tenses that were in use by the time of the New Testament.

And one of them, the most common, is a simple reference, which we would expect here, at least as it reads in English on the paper, "looks back," just looks back. That's not the tense of this verb. The verb that was chosen here is in the tense of what we often call the first-year Greek students, we call it the continuative tense. It's the tense that shows a recurring, ongoing action.

The example here is someone who's going to put his hand to the plow to go to the work that God calls him to do, but he's always looking over his shoulder. He can't keep but looking back at his home. Now look at what this is equated with. You're not fit for the work of the kingdom.

This is not just, I hope you understand, for missionaries and pastors or Bible translators. We're talking here about your everyday Christian who looks to God and says, you're the king, you're the shepherd, I'm going to follow you. If we're saying that, what we mean to the Lord is anything, any place. And if it's any place, I can't be sentimentally tied to my home. I've got to be willing to be nimble and mobile enough as a Christian to recognize if God calls me to Cincinnati, Charlotte, or Jendalee, Jordan, I'm there. That becomes my home. Because I'm there because I'm following the shepherd, Jesus Christ. I'm there to live for him wherever he takes me.



Our sentimental idiom of the 21st century is, home is where the heart is. That's what he's trying to prevent, is that your heart is somewhere else. Jesus had a first-century counter to that, as anachronistic as that phrase was. And he used to say this in Matthew 6:21, where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Your treasure can't be sentimentally tied to some other geographic location than the place where God has called you to serve, wherever that is. Never idolize a place, whether it's a type of place, a category of place, or whether it's a specific place.

Let me give you a third one here. This one may be the most subtle: an imagined place. There's an imagined place for a lot of people and they're seeking to get there. They can't wait to get there because in their mind then there's some real living there. And of course I'm a Christian and my identity is in Christ, so I'm going to, I just can see my Christian life unfolding there.

And that's a lot of times people in the middle of their life looking for retirement. Ah, I'm going to retire to Montana or Idaho. Everybody's leaving to Idaho. Oh, it's great. There's no laws. They carry guns to church. I don't know what it is. There are all these things they want to move to these places for.

Well, that's fantastic. And I understand that there's places, I suppose, that you may dream this imagined place that you want to be. But you've got to ask yourself, why would I make a move there? Am I really living my life for myself? Is that really what this is about? Is that becoming in my heart an idol, something that to me is more important than the will of God for my life? I've got to be careful.

I cannot in my heart have this imagined place, even if I wrap it in Christianity. Oh, that'll be a great place. I can see myself serving the Lord better there. Maybe that's not where God's going to call you. Maybe that imagined place is not where you should be, even if you wrap it not only in Christianese, but you may wrap it in ministry.

I've met people that say, I want to go to the mission field. I want to go to this foreign place and I want to serve God there and it'll be great. I'm going to reach people for Christ. It'll be awesome. I'll be a great ambassador for Christ in that place.



And I start asking them about their ambassadorship here. What's your life like here? Are you a light for Christ here? Tell me about your evangelism here. Well, well, well...

I don't understand that. So you're really going to start living the Christian life if you can just get to that place. You're going to really start engaging in your gifts and doing what God asked when you get there. Really?

Be careful. Do not in your heart idolize an imagined place. And I say this can be the most subtle of all. Sometimes we don't even see this as a problem because we think the problem for us Christians is we're not willing to be mobile. In other words, we think of the struggle and the sacrifice of leaving. But here's the problem for some people, they struggle with obedience in staying where they need to be and not imagining a better place to be.

Let me put it this way. I can't find this here in Luke 9, but I see a classic example of this in Mark chapter 5. Turn there real quickly, if you would, with me. In Mark chapter 5, and if you glance through the first part of this chapter, you might recognize the story of this demoniac who is afflicted and oppressed by these demons and by the power of Christ. He's healed, and you might remember the dramatic part is all these demons go into this herd of pigs and they go into the Sea of Galilee and it's very dramatic and all that.

Well, he's delivered. You can imagine. This notorious demoniac in Mark 5 is delivered. He wants to join the posse of Christ and go be this disciple that travels abroad. Jesus didn't want him to do that.

Verse 18: As he, that is Christ, was getting in the boat, the man who had been possessed with demons begged him. That's a big word, is it not? Pleaded with him, begged. He really wanted this, that he might be with him. You're going off on your journey to go do your thing. The itinerant rabbi, I want to go with you. I want to travel with you. I want to be a part of your band and travel all over and do the thing. I have this adventure. I'm ready to go. Let me go.

Verse 19, he did not permit him, but he said, go home to your friends. Yeah, I want you to be a missionary. I want you to represent me, but it's there. Tell them how much the Lord has done for you and how he had mercy on you.



Problem is, I don't think he was fully obedient to this. In verse number 20, he went away, and I think that was more than just to his home. Look at this. He began to proclaim in the Decapolis. That's the ten cities out there, northeast of the Sea of Galilee, and he began traveling around, telling how much the Lord had done for him, and everyone marveled.

He had a good response. He felt like he was doing a good thing. He was doing the right thing. That's what Christ told him to do. I'm not sure he's doing this in the right place. Christ was very specific. The people you grew up with, your friends, the people that knew you before this, the people in your hometown.

You know, the struggle for some people sitting right here in this auditorium is not their fear of being called somewhere else. It's their struggle of having to stay here. That's hard to believe in beautiful, wonderful South Orange County, California. But there's a lot of reasons people may say, I don't know that I want to be right where I'm at. I'd rather be somewhere else.

Don't ever idolize an imagined place. And you can see the theme in all three of these sub-points. And it's the problem of idolatry. And as John ended his little letter in 1 John, he said this in the very last phrase. He said, guard yourself from idols. No matter what it is.

You do understand what an idol is here. An idol is anything that I like or want or love more than God. Let's be specific. In this case, it's any place that I love more than I love the will of God. It's the place that I want to be at, whether it's a category of place, whether it's a specific place, or whether it's an imagined place that I hope to one day be. I need to say I love the will of God no matter where that is. And I love that more.

Because here's the problem. You may have the zip code that you like, and you might recognize you've lost really a lot more than you thought you gained. Let me put it this way: zip codes make for lousy gods. You know that? As soon as you get to paradise, wherever you think that is, whether it's here for the rest of your life or whether it's someplace else on the globe, there can always be trouble in paradise. And I can assure you, if you're running from the will of God, you'll be troubled. It will not be a place of God's blessing in your life. It'll end up being a place of God's discipline.

You need to be where God wants you to be, even if you're doing the right things. You can do the right things in the wrong place. And it can be because we've got a problem of idolatry in our heart.



Remember, last time we were together, we were talking about that question of love. And it was so poignant when Jesus comes to Peter there and he says, do you love me? And he starts with this, more than these. And we looked at all the variety of things that he could have meant by that in the passage in John 21. But let's just apply that to what we're talking about today.

If Christ is here talking to you this morning and asks you the question, let's think of it in terms of location and geography. Do you love him more than this place? That place? That category of place? Do you love him more? Is everything on the table? And when you say, I'll follow you wherever you go, does "whatever" really mean "whatever"?

And God may keep you right here. For most of you he probably will. And it'll be God's perfect will for your life. You'll probably die in some old person's home in Orange County. I mean, that may be God's will for your life. But he may call you to somewhere else. If it's not OC it'll be LA. If it's not LA it'll be who knows where. It could be Southeast Asia. It could be the Middle East. Could be Blythe, California. You never know.

My future. What I'm saying and what you're saying and what we should all be saying to Christ as followers of Christ is any place, because I don't idolize geography.

Now the question would be, why in the world would God want his people to be so nimble, so mobile? Why does he want us to be ready to move at any moment?

Well, here's why. Because God, let's call him the chess master, is in a chess game, if you will, moving his personnel, his resources to places on the globe for specific reasons. And here are the reasons: to connect you with other people. That's why.

God is not into building monasteries. You know this. He's not wanting us to be isolated somewhere on the top of a mountain or in the middle of a desert. He wants to move his Christian resources into places where there will be a sphere of influence. And sometimes on the timeline of life, he wants to move you from the sphere of influence you're in to a sphere of influence somewhere else. He wants to move those pieces around because he's got a game, if you will, a plan, a strategy.

And the question is, are you going to be so in love with the little square that you're in that you're not going to be useful to the master to be moved to a new sphere of relationships? You can't have



your feet rooted in one place because you like it. Or let me put it this way, maybe you don't see the reason as valued and important.

Turn with me to a little Old Testament book of Jonah. Go to Matthew and just start turning back through the small books, the minor prophets, until you get to the little prophet Jonah, which is more than a flannel graph story about a man's bad day in a big fish. This is not, God did not put this in the Bible just to give our kids a great flannel graph Sunday school lesson. The point is not about the man and the fish. The point is about the man and his problem in his heart.

The problem that was not reflective of the God he said he served, Jonah, which by the way, Hebrew students, and it's kind of a rare word, I suppose, but the word Jonah is the word in Hebrew for "dove." Do you know anything about the book of Jonah? He was anything but a dove. He was a hawk. He wanted the fire and brimstone to rain down on the city of Nineveh, the capital of the Assyrian kingdom. He did not want them to have God's grace.

When God called him to go, as you might remember, he said, I'm out of here. I'm going the opposite direction. Tarshish, this city, which we're not sure exactly where that is, but we know it's somewhere out west off the Mediterranean. He goes to the coastal city of Joppa, near Tel Aviv today, and he gets in a ship and he sails as far west as he can, or to put it in your terms, backwards this way. He sails out as far west as he can. It was probably a coastal city in Spain. So off he goes to Tarshish.

He was supposed to go over here to the top of the Euphrates Valley to the city of Nineveh, the capital of the Assyrian kingdom. This was several centuries before Christ. I mean, if you look at just the geography of it all, he's trying to get as far away from where God asked him to go as possible.

Now, that is a problem. What I want to diagnose is why. In chapter 4, he tells us why. He gives us in his own confessional here why he wants to not go where God wants to take him. And it's a problem in his heart about people.

Number two on your outline, before we even read this, jot this down if you would. We need to learn something that Jonah had not learned until the fourth chapter. And that is we need to learn to love people. Here it comes. Everywhere. Everywhere. We need to have a kind of indiscriminate, kind of international love for people.



And that's what Jonah didn't have. The only reason God would move you—I mean, I'm speaking in general terms. But this is how the Bible portrays it—is to get you in contact with other people on a daily basis, to put you in a new relational network. That's why he would move you.

And some of you have a particular category of place that you want to stay in because you don't see that this makes sense putting you outside of that network of place, or you don't want to leave the specific place, or the imagined place. And you need to realize that everything's on the table because the whole chessboard is God's, and any place he wants to move you to make an impact is because he cares about those people.

You are, you understand, an ambassador. I keep saying that, but that's 2 Corinthians 5 that says you are a representative of Christ. The ambassador has to be nimble and mobile and ready to move.

You are, if you want to put it in lesser terms because you feel like that's too much, sounds like a missionary or a pastor. How about this then? In Matthew 5, the Bible says that you are salt and you are light. You have a preserving effect on whatever environment that you're in. It preserves them. You are the stick-in-the-mud, if you will, at your office, in your neighborhood, that helps to restrain evil. Wherever you are, that's going to happen if you're a real Christian.

And you're light. You shine truth. Even if you're not preaching the gospel, you are a positive effect on society in whatever sphere you run in. And the Bible says he may want to move you from place to place because he cares about the people you will impact.

Jonah had a problem. He didn't care about those people. As a matter of fact, here's how it's put. Verse number 1: when God relented. That's what the "it" is here, the second word. But it displeased Jonah. What displeased Jonah? Look back up in chapter 3, the bottom of chapter 3. It's that they repented and God relented from destroying them.

Now, God had done that many, many, many, many times for Israel. And Jonah was mad that God did that for the Ninevites. It displeased Jonah. And then here's the word, exceedingly. And not only that, he was angry. He was mad about it.

And he prayed to the Lord and he said, O Lord, is not this what I said when I was yet in my own country? That this is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish. Why? Because I knew you're gracious and you're merciful and you're slow to anger and you're abounding in steadfast love and you relent



from disaster. And you've done that for years for us in Israel. And you just don't know when to stop being nice. I don't like the fact that you're going to be nice to these people.

Now therefore, O Lord, take my life. For it is better for me to die than to live. That sounds juvenile and childish, doesn't it? I'd rather die. And while you may never say it, though, I don't want to make a caricature out of Jonah because I think some of the same feelings run through our veins, do they not?

That if really I said you're going to Madras, that's God's will for you. You recognize that the providential open door is saturated in the word of God, godly counsel, godly desires, moving you to a place that is foreign to you, in some other part of the world. Some of you would look at your life as coming to an end. No more Outback, no more Irvine Spectrum, no more Lucille's. Oh man, life is over. You know what they eat over there?

It's juvenile as we read it on the page, but it's worse than juvenile. Let me give you four quick words. And these may seem incendiary and pejorative, but let me give them to you anyway: prejudicial, supremacist, xenophobic, ethnocentric. I'll give you a minute to spell all those.

Let's think that through. Prejudicial, supremacist, xenophobic, and ethnocentric. Jonah, unfortunately, has all of these problems to one degree or another. And I think perhaps we're prone to them as well.

Prejudicial. How in the world is he prejudicial? Well, look, he knows this about Israel because he's lived there his whole life. They're sinners. He knows that. They're sinners. In his own mind, though, his view of the Assyrian sins are worse than their sins. He prejudices them as being less deserving of the good that he brings.

Now, you may not see yourself as God's gift to wherever God wants to move you, but you are. You are an ambassador. You're salt and you're light. And whether you're an architect or a dentist or whatever you are, when you bring your life there and you do the thing God has called you to do and you live for Christ and you stand up for Christ and you're all that you should be for Christ, you're doing good to those people. You're an influence for God in that place.

And a lot of people think, I don't know that they really deserve that like the people that I currently influence. That's a kind of prejudicial thought. And in Jonah's mind, that's how he viewed it. I

mean, his thought was, yeah, the Assyrians are sinners and the Israelites are sinners, but they're worse sinners than we are.

When in reality, as the Bible would go on to say, really the more you know, the more culpable and accountable you are. In reality, you could argue that the Israelites were worse sinners than the Assyrians, as the last verse in this book says. I mean, in essence, that's the implication. I mean, they haven't had the advantage of all the light that Jonah was going to bring to them.

Don't be prejudicial. Supremacist? Really supremacist? Do you not think that Jonah thought that because these people were being called to be the beneficiaries of his life and ministry? I mean, that's what he was. He's a preacher. He's a prophet. Chapter 1 says that. He pulls out his business card. Jonah, prophet. That's what he does.

He thinks that really the people that he ministers to are better, see, more important than the people he's being sent to. And in some ways, in our hearts, I mean, that's easy to fall into that. I mean, I'm fine moving to Cincinnati and Charlotte. I can't see being in some place. I don't view them the way I view our people here.

Actually, that's a good employment of the word xenophobic. Xenophobic with an X. *Xenos* in Greek is the word "stranger" or "foreigner." *Phobic*, you know that word. From *phobos* in Greek, that means "fear." And I don't like usually the pejorative words that use the word fear because often that's not applicable because it's not fear. Well, in this case, a lot of times it is fear.

We fear them. They're weird. They're different. They're creepy. I don't know. I don't like it. They're weirdos. If God calls you to some part of the planet, I think in our minds, there's a lot of harboring in our own hearts a sense that they're just not, they're not right like we are here.

How about this one? Ethnocentric. *Ethnos*. We usually talk about ethnocentricity in missions, but *ethnos*, that word, the ethnicity or the nation. That's literally the word in Greek, the nation. And *centros*, center, we think that we're the center of everything.

Now, Jonah may have had some theological reason to believe that the descendants of Abraham were the center of God's redemptive plan. But books like this included in the canon show us they weren't the only people on God's radar.



And for us, we have no reason to think that. I know we do think that. You think when we get to heaven and you hear those lines about people from every tongue, tribe, and nation, there'll be a bunch of people that look like us, then around the edges, there'll be all these weird-looking people. Every tongue, tribe, and nation. You know what? You're the weird-looking person.

No, I mean that. Think about this. Historically, in God's redemptive plan, you're the minority. People haven't looked like you. You're the ones the Bible's talking about. You know, every tongue, tribe, and nation. Those pale-faced Caucasians will be there. We are on the fringe of this.

There's a bit of an ethnocentricity we carry around when God may be moving us to a place that not only we can argue for sure is just as important to God as our little Western culture that you may be willing to live in. We need to recognize there's no place for prejudicial thinking among Christians. There's no place for any supremacy thoughts that our people are better. There's no place at all in our hearts to think, well, they're weird, being afraid of these foreign people. And there's certainly no place in our hearts at all for ethnocentricity.

Jonah, unfortunately, struggled with all of those things, and he said, you know what, I'm done. If you're going to put my life here and make this the center of my ministry right now, I don't even want to be there.

So God, verses 5 through 9, gives a little illustration. And you know the story, probably. I assume you do. He goes and builds a shelter on the side of town. It gets real hot. God turns the thermostat up on purpose. And he stands out there or sits out there, builds a shelter, and he waits. Maybe God will relent from his relenting and maybe he'll blast them after all.

So he's sitting on the hillside watching to see what will happen to the city of Nineveh. God then, in his grace, grows up quickly, probably some kind of bean plant, this big leafy plant that grows up and gives him shade. And the prophet Jonah is so excited about that. He's so relieved. Isn't that great? Oh, praise the Lord. I got a shade here. I can sit out here in the breeze and be shaded. That's awesome.

Then God says, great, worm time. The worm then goes, eats the plant, and the plant dies. Rapidly grows, rapidly dies. Then God turns up the thermostat even more. Hot, scorching wind blows on Jonah. And Jonah gets mad and he says it a second time. God, just kill me. Be better if I was dead. Now I'm burning up hot. Just kill me now.

Here's what God replies with in verse 10. It's the key word in the whole book. The Lord said, verse 10, you—here's the word, underline it, the whole point of the book—pity the plant. You pity the plant. You just had a funeral for a plant. Oh, the plant was so great, right? Dearly departed plant. You cared about the plant. You didn't labor for it. You didn't plant it. You didn't fertilize it. You didn't make it grow. You didn't water. You did none of that. It just sprung up overnight, perished in the night.

Now should I not—your same word—pity Nineveh? Now that place I did care for. Those people I did form the hair follicles on their head. I did number their bodies, their lives, their soul, their reflection of the image of God. I did all of that. I cared for them. I fed them. I cared for these people and this great city, and there's 120,000 people there. And by the way, they don't have the advantage of all the prophets of Israel. They don't know hardly anything about right and wrong. They don't know their right hand from their left. I sent you there for a reason, and look at the prosperity of this place. Look at the powerful impact this city could have if it just repented of its wickedness. It's got all the head of cattle there.

Jonah, you don't pity these people. There's the key. Number two on your outline, we've got to make sure we love people everywhere. And maybe another way to put that—you wrote that down—we need to make sure we love people more than places. Because wherever God will send you, there will be people. And when he sends you to those people, you'd better have compassion on those people.

And to use a real dramatic illustration, and though we don't feel it because we're not in the ethnic, you know, consternation between these two folks. You remember in John 4 when Jesus stops in Sychar at Jacob's well. And here come all these people after the discussion with the woman at the well. And they're coming back. And Jesus says to the disciples this: lift up your eyes. Look to this little gully here, this valley between the city of Sychar and Jacob's well. And he says, the field, it's just, it's ripe for harvest. Let's enter into the labor. Let's reap.

Now that was mind-blowing for the disciples. These good Jewish boys were looking at these Samaritans, which they hated worse than Gentiles—at least that was the cultural expectation, to hate them. And Jesus says, look at these people. Time to get these people saved. And off they went. And they did. They're the harvest.

You want to fix the problem of geographic idolatry, you need to refocus your eyes. If God calls you to any place on the planet, there will be people, people that God made, people that God wants to



influence, people that God wants to touch by your life. You need to go there going, I got to love people more than places.

Secondly, there's an issue of the heart. The word here is compassion. Jesus used that analogy again in Matthew chapter 9 when he spoke of the harvest, and he said, here's the problem. We don't have people in the harvest. And he revealed why in the preceding verses. He said this, look at the people. He says they're helpless and harassed. They're like sheep without a shepherd.

The Bible says he felt *splagchnizomai*. He felt compassion. He felt it in his gut. These people are lost. They need help. Then he turned to his disciples and he said, beseech, beg the Lord of the harvest to—strongest Greek word he could come up with—*ekballō*, just to push them out into the harvest field.

It may not be to India or China that God calls you. It might just be across the cul-de-sac, to get out of your driveway and to march across the cul-de-sac. But if you recognize that God is calling you out of your comfort zone, it needs to be because you realize God has you where he has you, or he's going to take you where he's going to take you, because he wants you to care about those people.

You need to refocus your eyes and you need to recalibrate your heart so you realize these people are the reason. If God didn't care about people, he'd keep every Christian exactly where they were. But he doesn't. He moves them around.

Let me show you a quick passage on this. 2 Timothy chapter 4. I want to show you how nimble the pieces on the chessboard are in the Bible. And I also want to show you one guy here that is notorious in the Scripture. And I want you to recognize and think this through just through the prism of geography. His name is Demas. You remember him? 2 Timothy 4.

Just to think of the mobility of the chess pieces, look at verse 9. Do your best to come to me soon. Here's Paul writing to Timothy, and he's saying to Timothy, hey, I need you to come here. Why? Well, because one of my trusted associates here, Demas, is, look at this, in love with the present world. He has deserted me, and he's gone to Thessalonica.

Now, I'd just like to interview him, my little interview show, you know, put a mic in front of him. Hey, Demas, tell me now, as you sit here in Thessalonica, why did you come to Thessalonica? Why



did you abandon the work that God had called you to do, and instead of being where you should be, you're here in Thessalonica. Tell me why.

Now, Jesus, as he always does, reveals the reason. It's something about the loves of his heart. He is, as Paul says, in love with the present world. But I just wonder what the reasons would be, the specific ones. I'll bet they'd be echoed in a lot of our reasons for not being where we should be.

I don't know what it was. Work's too hard. It's too weird. I don't know what it was. Maybe it was just, I just love Thessalonica. Man, you know the housing market? You know what I can buy there? Man, that'd be a great place. The civic center, the stuff they have for my kids. Thessalonica is where it's at. I don't know what the reason was, but it was a problem of his heart being in love with something that was temporal instead of something eternal.

Just to finish out what I'm trying to illustrate here, the mobility of the godly people. Crescens has gone to Galatia, I assume for good reason. Titus to Dalmatia, I'm sure he went for good reason. Luke alone is with me. Now get Mark. I know he's over there and you can round him up. Bring him with you. He's useful to me for ministry. Tychicus, I sent to Ephesus. And when you come, you're going to come to me, bring the, you know, the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas and the books and above all the parchments. Those are the Scriptures. Bring all of that. I need all of that.

Everybody's moving at light speed on the chessboard in the first century. And you and I, because we happen to live in a prosperous place, if you compare it to all of history, in this modern era, we dig our roots down. We get real comfortable where we're at. And we think, oh, I'm sure God would never—I mean, look, I've invested so much in this house and I got this job. I'm sure God would never...

Don't be so sure. You never know. You need to say to God, any place, because you may want to reposition this chess piece to influence people that aren't here.

Now, this works both ways. And as I've already admitted, I know a lot of you will be right here in Orange County, maybe for the rest of your life. I get that. But sometimes your challenge is to stay, and you need to understand, no matter how difficult it gets with your coworkers or your neighbors or whatever it is, you need to recognize that if you are here because people are the reason, and God cares about people, then you just need to keep your heart calibrated and your eyes focused on why God has you where he has you. Just be focused on that. That'll help you through the struggle of it all.



And if, by the way, you're pressed by God's Spirit, the *ekballō* of God is pressing you with the providential open doors and the desire and everything's falling into place and the counsel's moving you somewhere and there's fear and discomfort. Just know he's sending you there because of people. So keep your eyes focused and your heart recalibrated.

And I know that means a kind of mobility that makes us feel like we're just kind of, we have no home. We have a home if you're a follower of Christ. But what you need to recognize is it's just not here.

Number three on your outline. Write this down if you would. You need to see home is elsewhere. Home is not here. And I know you may have thought that as a new Christian when you were 21. You were, you know, saying, oh, Jesus, he's great. You know, you're ready to do anything for Christ. The world's not my home. But, you know, after a few kids and a mortgage and a couple cars, you may have lost that idea. Your home is wherever your home is.

One last passage I'd like to show you this morning in Hebrews chapter 11 of a man who was called to leave his home. And he did it right. And he was called to be an example, at least in the way he left his home and followed God. And he learned something along the way, that in his frequent travels and moving around for the will of God, he learned something about where his home really was. Hebrews chapter 11.

Start in verse number 8. Hebrews chapter 11, and if you know your Bible in the Old Testament, what this is in response to is the call of God on Abraham in Genesis 12. And when, like in Genesis 22, when Jesus—I'm sorry, when God rather—comes to Abraham and calls him to do something, sometimes he lays it on thick so that we can understand exactly the sacrifice involved.

Like when he says in Genesis 22, take your son, your only son, the son that you love, now go sacrifice him. He does the same thing in Genesis chapter 12, verse 1. He said, leave your home. Leave your father's home. Leave your kindred. Leave your homeland. Go. I'm going to go, and I'm going to show you where I want you to be.

Verse 8, Hebrews 11 says, by faith, which is going to take a great deal of, if you're going to follow God, he's going to be your shepherd. Abraham obeyed. And when he was called to go out to a place that he was going to receive as an inheritance, he did it. He obeyed God, and he went out, not knowing where he was going.

By faith, verse 9. He went to live in the land of promise. Now, you can put that in quotes because we know how this is supposed to work out, and it would be some 600 years later that Joshua and Caleb would actually go in and inhabit that land of Canaan. So for him, he didn't experience that. As a matter of fact, here's the contradiction. He lived in the quote-unquote land of promise, but he lived there as in a foreign land, living not in a five-bedroom house or some sprawling place on a hill. He lived in tents with his son Isaac and his grandson Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise.

For he was looking forward—here's what he learned along the way—to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God.

Now that's a subtle literary shift in this text, but note it. He's going to the promised land. He's willing to leave the comforts of his home, his father's house, his kindred, leave all that he had and follow God. Now where's he going to follow him? To a place that couldn't even feel like home. I'm in a tent. I'm just sojourning through.

But in the process of leaving behind what was comfortable for him, he recognized that the world itself was not his home. Drop down to verse 13. All of these died in faith—Sarah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob—not having received the things promised, but having seen them. Now, this is interesting. Wait a minute. If you didn't receive it, "seen them"? We're talking about land still? Keep reading.

And greeted them from afar. Oh, he actually walked through the dusty parts that he would one day, or his descendants would, inherit. That's not what we're talking about here.

Having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles, not in Canaan, but on the earth. Now we're bleeding into a big eternal principle. He recognized this. Earth's not home.

For people who speak thus, and by the way, I hope you're part of that people that speak thus. I hope you're the people that can say, I am a stranger and an exile on earth. I hope you can go home this afternoon, look at yourself in the bathroom mirror, and say, you know what, when it comes to life on planet earth, this is not my home. I'm not, I'm not, this is not the end-all. Therefore, I can be as mobile as you want me to be, God.



Verse 14, for people who speak thus make it clear they're seeking a homeland. Do you see the play on words here? People that recognize there's no home here for me, they're seeking a home.

If they had been thinking of the land from which they had gone out, if they idolized geography or a zip code, no, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they didn't idolize that. They desire a better country, a heavenly one.

Therefore, here's a big jarring statement, God is not ashamed to be called their God. Do you see this is a passage that really just intersects germanely right to what we're speaking of? Geography. People that say any place, follow God anywhere, they don't idolize geography. The Bible says God is not ashamed to be called their God.

I just wonder, is God a little ashamed to be called your God? Because you are so into where you live and where you would and wouldn't go for God. Therefore, God is not ashamed to be called their God—people that look in the mirror and say, I am a stranger and alien here. I want a homeland and it's somewhere else.

Well, the good news is he has prepared for them a city that in verse 10 is called not just a city, the city whose designer and builder is God.

Home is where the heart is, where your heart is or your treasure will be. Let's just get all this straight. When it comes down to it, whether you're thinking of that home in Montana, that perfect place to do ministry in inland or whatever it is, or here in Orange County living out your dreams. It's not what it's about. You can't keep it anyway. James said you're a vapor. You know that, right? A mist. You can't keep it. It will never be fulfilling for you, ever. You'll have little touches of all this, whatever that'll be. Oh, that's great. I love my home.

Your real home's not here. If it is, we've got a real bad spiritual systemic problem in your life. Earth is contemporary. Our heart's got to be where it belongs.

It's a great summary verse in one sentence. 1 John 2:17: The world is passing away along with its desires. All the things that people want when they read their home magazines. All of it. Click through the websites that talk about homes and properties and decorating. Listen, I'm all for that, right? Decorate your house. It's great. But here's the deal. All of that stuff's passing away. But whoever does the will of God, that's what I'm here to talk about. That person abides forever.



What started there in verse 8 in Hebrews 11 began in verse 6, which said, without faith it's impossible to please God. And if you have that faith and you trust him, you've got to believe that he exists. We're theists here. We believe he's revealed himself. We believe he's going to guide us in life. And we've got to believe that he is a rewarder of those who seek him.

I recognize this: there's no big sacrifice here for me, for me to say Orange County is not my home. California is not my home. America is not my home. I'm good serving God, being a light and salt wherever God wants to take me. It's no big deal because when I lose it all, that's when I find my life. If I'm willing to let it go.

Some of you are holding on too tightly to this. Some of you are so concerned about where you live. We need to be a lot less concerned about that.

Remember David being chased by Saul? I mean, the number one wanted person in Israel. He finds himself in the Judean desert, which if you've ever been there, is just burning up hot, dusty, dirty. It's very awful. And yet, God took care of him. He prepared a table before David in the presence of his enemies.

That psalm, of course, Psalm 23, is the song he wrote—had to be drawn from those days of running from King Saul. And what did he say? Well, you prepared a table before me in the presence of my enemies. When I walked through the valley, I said, I fear no evil.

Now, I prefer the green pastures and the still waters. But you know what? When I'm in the place I don't want to be, it doesn't matter. When I'm taken to a place I'm afraid to go to, it doesn't matter. Your rod and your staff, they comfort me. It's okay.

There was another godly man being chased by a king. The king was named Ahab, and his wife was the worst queen of all, Jezebel. He found himself in a desert as well. Do you remember that? 1 Kings 19, he's running. And he's there in a place he doesn't want to be, just like David was in a place he didn't want to be. And what was God doing? Meeting his needs, preparing a table before him in the presence of his enemies. Had a stream, had a brook, had a place, had shelter, had a place to sleep. The ravens were bringing him lunch. Think about that. Sandwiches are coming in from the sky. God was taking care of his prophet.



You know, Elijah there could have written the 23rd Psalm at that point. But did he? Sunday school graduates? What did Elijah say? Kill me. Kill me. I'm done. Better if I'm dead.

Two men, places they prefer not to be. One was a lot less concerned about where he was. Instead, he was concerned about who he was following. The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not want. Okay. Wherever it is. Still waters? Green pastures? Valley of the shadow of death? A table with enemies surrounding me? I'm okay.

Elijah, godly man, right? Godly man. We stand in respect for great Elijah the prophet. But that was a bad day for him. He did not provide us with a good example.

I know godly people like you and me can have problems being in a place we don't want to be or fearing that we're going to have to go to a place we don't want to go. I'd prefer you be more like David than Elijah when it comes to that.

By the way, one of the great things about Jonah's story is when he ran from God, we knew what happened. He found himself in cramped quarters, did he not? Jonah had a real bad day. But the grace of God, strangely enough, through being barfed up on the shores of the Mediterranean, was that in verse 1 of chapter 3, the Bible says, and the word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time. And what did it say? Could have cut-and-paste from the first chapter. Go to Nineveh. Prophecy to them what I'm going to tell you to prophesy.

Maybe you've been running from God in terms of geography. Maybe you're not content where you are and you need to be. Maybe you are not willing to go where you need to go. And if you've been fighting him and you've been dealing with some of the discipline of the Lord, it'd be a good morning for you to recognize, as Jonah did in the second chapter of Jonah, in his distress, he called out in confession to the Lord.

Confess it. Tell him you're sorry for loving real estate as an idol, a zip code more than people. Tell him you're willing right now to go anywhere. And you know what? Even if, for most of us, which is probably the case, he won't send you anywhere else. You'll be free in your heart. There'll be that sense of cleansing in your heart. No idols here when it comes to geography.

But if you have been holding out, here's the gracious thing about God. The conviction will come. The doors will open. I mean, if you don't follow him, he'll start pushing you, and he will lead you



where he wants to take you. Just obey him. Respond to the calling. Be willing to do anything for Christ in any place.

Let's pray.

God, help us to be nimble. I know this is not to be spoken of in trite words because it's costly, not only financially but emotionally. It's hard to leave a geographic location. It's hard to say to you, hey, everything's on the table, even this home I've lived in for years or this city that I love to raise my kids in or this culture that I so enjoy and appreciate, the weather here in Southern California that I like, whatever it might be.

But God, this is not our home. And we need to reflect the character of Christ, who, if he had not left his home to come and minister among us—I mean, he certainly didn't prefer Bethlehem and Nazareth to heaven. But he was willing to lay aside all of that, to go where he needed to go, in the will of God, so that he might benefit us.

God, let us, in such a small way, I know, but see our lives as the kind of Christian life that we should be, willing to go to a place to be a blessing to people, being light and being salt, being an ambassador. God, I know that's a kind of move that is a big deal. And God, we don't want to just use this message as an excuse to move, but we certainly want this sermon and this principle to make sure that we don't have roots in a place that really are more important to us than obedience to your call.

So God, allow our hearts to be nimble, mobile, obedient, saying to you, we'll do anything in any place. In Jesus' name, Amen.