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Who Do You Trust?

Selected Scriptures

Prayer: *Father, we just again, we thank you for your grace, we thank you for your goodness, we thank you that you love us, you have loved us enough to send your Son, you love us enough to send us your word, and we have the privilege, Lord, of opening it up, asking your Holy Spirit to accompany us, and to make it of permanent value. And so I pray this morning, Lord, as we do just that, that you would give us the ability to open your word, the ability to see what is there to see that it's there for us and for our growth and for our learning and that you would again open our eyes and ears and hearts and minds so that we might take this in and it would be of permanent value. And I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well, many, many years ago when I was just a young boy, I used to watch quiz shows. I used to watch one quiz show religiously. Johnny Carson was the host before he became the host of the *Tonight Show*. That dates me and a lot of you don't know who Johnny Carson is now, I think. The show consisted of three different married

couples. They were given a series of different topics, and in each case the husband is asked if he should answer the question or if he would defer to his wife who'd be better able to do so. It captured the attention of enough people to stay on TV for quite a while and the show was entitled "Who Do You Trust?" That really dates me. But this morning I want to ask the very same question, but I want to ask it with a lot greater urgency and much higher consequence.

Last week, as you know, was the Tri-State Pregnancy Center's banquet, and I had the privilege of speaking there, and I chose to speak about what God did through the Prophet Jonah. So I want to share a little bit of that with you this morning because it really does have something to say about the God that we trust or not. And so I opened my chat, it was kind of a mixed audience, so I opened my chat last week with an easy biblical quiz. If you don't get this quiz, you're hopeless. Okay. So here's the pressure now, so, okay, I put it before a jeopardy statement and the statement is this: This Old testament biblical prophet was swallowed by a whale. Okay. Now, if you answered with the question: Who was Jonah? I said congratulations, you got it half right. And here's why. You see the actual Hebrew text describing what happened to Jonah doesn't specify at all that it was a whale who swallowed him. In fact, the Hebrew term that is used there describes simply a large sea creature. It's translated this way in *Jonah 1:17*, it

says: *And the LORD appointed a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.* Well, "the LORD appointed" means God raised up whatever kind of creature it was, could have been a whale, could have been a fish, could have been something entirely different, could have been a Winnebago with fins and scales, nobody knows. But whatever it was, it accommodated God's prophet for three days and three nights before it vomited him out. And I said it's sad to say that much of the commentary that people have about Jonah today, it revolves around what it was that supposedly swallows him as opposed to who Jonah was and what he was about.

Well, Jonah was a prophet of God. He was also a narcissist, a bit of an idol worshiper and a bit of a racist as well, but we'll get to that shortly. What Jonah was was a man of extraordinary courage and, you know, he had to be to do what he really did. God told Jonah he was to deliver a specific message to a specific group of people known as the Ninevites. Now Nineveh was the capital of the Assyrian Empire and the Assyrians, they were the original practitioners of what ISIS practiced before it was defeated. I mean the Ninevites were really one of the original terrorists. They didn't have the Internet, they didn't have videos but they did leave a record that was carved in stone and their record showed that they were into the very same atrocities that ISIS was into and

some others that were worse. And their idea was, you know, you commit atrocities on people that are so terrifying and so terrific that your reputation alone is going to be able to discourage anybody from attacking you. Well, the Ninevites didn't hesitate to commit these atrocities not only on men but on women and children as well, and their number one enemy was Israel.

So God says to Jonah, "*Arise and go to Nineveh.*" I mean it's the equivalent of asking a prominent Jewish rabbi to arise and go visit ISIS headquarters, but Jonah doesn't say a word. He just goes down to the docks and he orders himself a one-way ticket going in the exact opposite direction. Big mistake. I mean most of us know the story. He gets on the ship, the ship gets into a full force gale, the winds are howling, the ship is pitching violently and it looks like everything is going to come apart. The crew is desperate, they're in fact throwing all of the stuff overboard because they think the ship is just literally going to come apart. And meanwhile our prophet is down in the cargo hold sound asleep. Well, the captain's already used up all of his prayers to his god, so has the crew, and so he goes down to Jonah and he says, you better try your God because our gods aren't working. And Jonah knows exactly where the storm is coming from and he also knows what the solution is. And so he tells the crew, throw me into the sea and the storm will stop. And so reluctantly they do just that.

And suddenly a great fish or a whale or something swallows him whole, and as the Bible says, Jonah was in the belly of the fish for three days and three nights. Just think about that. That's a lot of time to do some very heavy thinking in a very dark, very cramped, very smelly place. And the course of that is that Jonah recognizes his rebellion, he realizes that all he really cared about in all of this, it's not the Jewish nation, it's not the Ninevites, it's not even God. Jonah realizes that it was all about Jonah, that he had made the nation of Israel his idol. And so he confesses this before God. And so God speaks to his appointed fish and the fish has an extreme bout of indigestion and he deposits Jonah on shore. Well, Jonah's come a long way but he still has a long way to go. And so God says to Jonah: *"Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it the message that I tell you."* Well, Jonah's a lot more inclined to obey this time. But you look back and you just look at Jonah, here's this fellow, he stinks to high heaven, his skin has probably been bleached white, he could certainly use a change of clothes, but obviously there's no Wal-Mart's outside of Nineveh. And Nineveh is no small town, we know that it's this huge city because the archeologists have uncovered much of it and said that its circumference covered some sixty miles, that it had about 150,000 inhabitants.

And so I want you to picture Jonah, he's been spat out on a beast,

he's bleached, he's perfumed, he's walking up to the town center in a place known for butchering Jewish people and putting them on display. Nonetheless, Jonah makes his grand entry. And he somehow manages to get to wherever the Ninevites' public address system was and he comes up to the center of town and he makes this pronouncement. He says -- quote -- "*Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!*" Well, Jonah gives the Ninevites some incredibly important information, but he also withholds a great deal more information about the God that he's serving. You see, he conveniently left out some critical information, something that he knew about God but -- quote -- "forgets" to mention. It's the part about who God is. He hides from the Ninevites the fact that God is a gracious God, that he's a merciful God, that he's slow to anger, that he would forestall destroying Nineveh if they repented. He never mentioned that because that's the last thing that Jonah wanted. So he blurts out this one thing, Nineveh, forty days and you're done! Well, now Jonah was either crazy or a man of astounding courage because he's doing this knowing the consequences. I mean just picture ISIS at the height of its strength and power. Imagine what they could have done to a Jewish prophet barging into their town squares telling them that they have forty days to get right with God. The fact Jonah wasn't instantly captured and tortured was absolutely miraculous. But it's not surprising considering the book of Jonah. You see, the book of

Jonah is actually a book about miracles, I mean, literally just in what we've covered so far, there's been about a half dozen of them. The storm was miraculously brewed, the fish was obviously a miracle, Jonah's survival for three days, there's no doubt that's a miracle, being vomited on shore is gross but it's obviously still a miracle. And being able to walk into a great city of your greatest enemy, get ahold of whatever their PA system is and shout out a bitter one-sentence warning without getting yourself butchered, that's the stuff of miracles. But they're all minor miracles. They're minor miracles compared to what happened next. This is what Jonah says. It says: *And the people of Nineveh believed God. They called for a fast and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them to the least of them. The word reached the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, removed his robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes.* You want to talk about miracles. I mean just think about this for a second. This is no ordinary people. These are people known throughout the ancient world as being monstrously vicious. These are people who tortured and commit mayhem and terror, a bizarre looking man, stinking of rotting fish has come into the center of town, he's a member of a race that they've sworn to annihilate and this guy's telling them in forty days his God's going to eliminate them. And instead of an instant ticket to martyrdom, the entire city including the king, repents, and they repent in sackcloth and ashes. I mean, that's

150,000 people and they to a man, woman and child all repent.

So you have this incredible scene. Jonah is praying this miserable, disobedient, anger-filled prayer for the Ninevites and the entire nation gets transformed. And not only do they repent in sackcloth and ashes, they go one better than that. They made their cattle repent as well. Speaking of the king of Nineveh, the Bible says this: *And he issued a proclamation and published through Nineveh, "By the decree of the king and his nobles: Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything. Let them not feed or drink water, but let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and let them call out mightily to God." Let everyone turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands. Who knows, God may turn and relent and turn from his fierce anger, so that we may not perish. When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God relented of the disaster that he had said he would do to them, and he did not do it.*

Now I had mentioned that Jonah had profited greatly from those three days that he spent inside the belly of the fish and that he had repented, but his repentance wasn't really full, it wasn't really complete. I mean he was still self-absorbed, he still hated the Ninevites and everything that they stood for, and he still saw his job as announcing Nineveh's destruction, period. And so when

God relents at the sight of their repentance, Jonah's furious. Jonah 4 says this: *But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry. And he prayed to the LORD and said, "O LORD, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country? That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster. Therefore now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live."* I mean Jonah's saying I knew it, I knew it, I just knew you were going to save these rotten enemies of Israel and, quite frankly, I just as soon die than see that, so why don't you kill me, God. It's really surprising that God didn't take him up on that. But, you know, God is so gracious and so kind that he responds to Jonah by saying: *"Do you do well to be angry?"*

So what do we make, what do we make of Jonah's plea to the Ninevites? I mean what made it so effective? I mean it wasn't his reputation, obviously he had none; it wasn't his appearance, that should be obvious; it wasn't his intent, I mean, he wanted only their destruction. You see, what mattered wasn't his reputation, his appearance or his intent, what mattered was his God. Jonah makes an outlandishly bold statement and God causes an entire nation to respond instantly. I mean, do you see what this is telling us? I mean what God is telling us here is something that I

think we so often forget, and that is that God lives rent-free inside the minds of every single one of us and the ability to move an entire nation to repentance instantly lies solely with him. Many is a time I doubted God's ability to move in the hearts and minds of others. I thought of myself as essentially on my own when it came to difficult people and difficult circumstances, not realizing that God is far more sovereign than I ever imagined. My ability to trust God in all circumstances grew enormously the more I realized the extent of his power and ability to move hearts.

Let me give you another example where God demonstrates his ability to live wholesale in the minds of even his enemies. I want to call your attention to a number of amazing verses in the Old Testament which, again, have to do with the power of God to move hearts and minds. And to set the stage here, we're talking about God instructing Moses as to how he's going to be leading God's people out of Egypt. Understand for 400 years they've been slaves in Egypt, they've been crying out to God, God is now going to move them out, and he's going to move them out through Moses. So he tells Moses what is going to be taking place after these plagues descend on Egypt and after Pharaoh is thoroughly broken. And what God tells Moses harkens back to Israel's laws about slavery, laws that had first been put out in the book of Deuteronomy.

You know, it's become very popular to say that the Bible supports slavery, and it's simply not true, it's just a matter of getting the terms right. "Slavery," quote, unquote, in Israel had nothing to do with the slavery that the Jews were subjected to in Egypt. It was a slavery that had a beginning and an end point, and it was a lot more like indentured servitude. See, in Israel a person who had no means could indenture himself to somebody for a period of time during which his labor belonged to his master. And the difference between that and actual slavery was that it was for a prescribed period of time, after which God had specific rules governing the exit from slavery. Listen to what *Deuteronomy 15* says. It says: *"If your brother, a Hebrew man or a Hebrew woman, is sold to you, he shall serve you six years, and in the seventh year you shall let him go free from you. And when you let him go free from you, you shall not let him go empty-handed. You shall furnish him liberally out of your flock, out of your threshing floor, and out of your winepress. As the LORD your God has blessed you, you shall give to him. You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God redeemed you; therefore I command you this today."*

God, of course, is referring to the slavery that Israel endured in Egypt. And again, you have to understand, this is a slavery that God prophesied about to Abraham hundreds of years before it would

even take place. And not only does God tell Abraham that it's going to take place but he tells them how long it's going to last, and he also points out that he's going to uniquely treat the slaves being liberated from Egypt just the way he would command Israel to treat their own slaves. God told Israel that not only were they to free a slave after six years but they were to send him out with an ample supply of what he needed to get reestablished. God told Abraham that he would provide for the Jews enslaved by Egypt exactly the way he demanded the Jews provide for their own slaves that they were liberating. This is what he said, as he's speaking to Abraham in *Genesis 15*. It says: *Then the LORD said to Abram, "Know for certain that your offspring will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs and will be servants there, and they will be afflicted for four hundred years. But I will bring judgment on the nation that they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions."* You see Deuteronomy demanded that a slave being liberated had to be compensated. And so uniquely God arranges for just that to happen as Israel leaves Egypt. And so hundreds of years later this is beginning to unfold, and God is speaking to Moses explaining what's going to take place after Egypt has been brought to her knees. And he promises Moses that the Jewish slaves would receive a unique form of compensation for their time in Egypt. And this is what God says. This is *Exodus 3:20*. He says: *So I will stretch out my hand and strike Egypt with all*

the wonders that I will do in it; after that he will let you go. And I will give this people favor in the sight of the Egyptians; and when you go, you shall not go empty, but each woman shall ask of her neighbor, and any woman who lives in her house, for silver and gold jewelry, and for clothing. You shall put them on your sons and on your daughters. So you shall plunder the Egyptians."

Well, sure enough, after plague after plague after plague is resisted and after the firstborn in all of Egypt is killed and the angel of death has arrived, Pharaoh relents. He agrees to let the people go. But God has plans and he's told Abraham about these plans hundreds of years ago and the plans are just how the Israelites were going to plunder the Egyptians before they left. This is what he says in *Exodus 12:35*. He says: *The people of Israel had also done as Moses told them, for they had asked the Egyptians for silver and gold jewelry and for clothing. And the LORD had given the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they let them have what they asked. Thus they plundered the Egyptians.*

You know, it's easy to gloss over that passage and kind of lose the impact of what it's really saying, but understand what's taking place here. God hundreds of years before had predicted to Abraham exactly what was going to happen. Now it's starting to unfold.

And the slaves who were leaving Egypt, actually they're inflicting this incredible financial devastation on Egypt. All the free labor that they had counted on for 400 years is now walking out the door. And what are the Egyptians doing? They're showering the Israelites with anything their heart desires. And it's not like the Egyptians had this warm, fuzzy relationship with their Jewish slaves. They had no love whatsoever for the Israelites. As far as they were concerned they were just a form of two-legged cattle to be exploited and used.

And so here we have this scene, God has thoroughly devastated the nation of Egypt and now all of the slaves are assembling to leave, but one final blow needs to be accomplished. And just like in Deuteronomy God demands that the now freed slaves leave not empty-handed but laden down with the wealth that Egypt had accumulated on their backs. What is amazing here is that God tells the Jews that all they have to do is ask. He says he would make the Egyptians favorably inclined to respond. Just try to picture what that looks like. Picture the Jews walking out the door and saying to their former masters, by the way, I really like those gold earrings and that broach and that silver candelabra over there looks really good. How about that box of coins? Because God gave the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians, the Egyptians can't wait to say, "Take it; it's yours." They do that not because they

feel compelled to but because God has so thoroughly worked into their wills a desire to do so. Do you understand the implications of what God is doing here? I mean God is so thoroughly sovereign that should he decide it is best, he can work within the wills of Israel's enemies to make them want what he wants them to want. I mean God was determined to plunder the wealth of Egypt that had been gotten on the backs of 400 years of Israelite slavery. And there's a whole number of ways he could have done that. He could have done that militarily, I mean, he could have tied up and physically restrained the Egyptians so that the Jews could take whatever they have wanted, he could have put the Egyptians into some kind of deep sleep so the Jews could steal it away that way, but instead he chooses this unique way of plundering Egypt by working directly through the wills of the Egyptians. He's granting the Israelites favor so that the Egyptians not only give them their wealth but they give it to them voluntarily. They gave it to them because God made them -- quote -- "favorably disposed" to give all their wealth away.

So once again an entire people group is moved by God to want what he wants them to want. I don't know which is more astounding, the mass repentance of the Ninevites or the mass favorable disposition of the Egyptians, but either way it tells us something of the nature of God's interaction with our world. And when I start

wondering whether or not I can trust God in all things particularly when I'm dealing with difficult people and circumstances, I have to realize that God can and sometimes does bend the wills of even unbelievers to suit his purpose. I know for many folks this violates the cardinal rules of how they understand God operating in our world. I've heard it many, many times, God is a perfect gentleman and he will never, never violate the sovereignty of your own personal will. Hey, that sounds good. But I have to say, I have searched the scriptures and I have never found a verse to back that up, ever. I find verses that say the exact opposite, however. I find *Proverbs 21:1* which says: *The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord; he turns it wherever he will.* May I suggest to you that if God never asked Egypt -- or God never did ask Egypt if they would mind. He never said would you mind if I have your will changed so thoroughly and so completely reprogramming it so that they now want nothing more than to give away their wealth to people who they previously thought of as cattle? God doesn't ask permission for that.

But what does this have to do with us? Well, let me put this in terms that I used to use with my kids, terms I still use with my grandkids all the time when I'm trying to simplify and get down to basics. What I try to say is, understand, God is the boss of the Ninevites. He's also the boss of the Egyptians. In fact God is

the boss of every single person who's ever walked this planet. See, the vast majority of people on this planet have no idea of the power and authority that God possesses. They think they're in charge of their own lives when they are not. You know many think that they are mere creatures, products of evolution, answerable to no one. Again, they are mistaken. You see, God is the author of creation, not evolution. Because God is the author, he has the ability and the right to move within the wills of any and all people any way he chooses. He's under no obligation whatsoever to be what we consider to be a perfect gentleman by regarding our wills and autonomy as sacrosanct, as something he has no right to touch. I mean if my will is sacrosanct, then God can only hope the best for me when things don't go the way he plans. And I don't want and I don't believe in a God who's in heaven biting his nails hoping everything works out. And I can't firmly place my trust in a God who is unwilling or unable to effect all the different aspects of my life, particularly those parts that seem to be insisting that I'm on my own. I mean if you or I were witnessing a recently repentant Ninevite or a suddenly generous Egyptian, we wouldn't argue with that statement at all. I mean if that wasn't actually true, if God didn't really intervene in the lives of those who turn to him, there'd be nobody who turns to him. There would be nobody coming into the kingdom of God because every single one of us starts out wanting nothing to do with God. And God made that

as abundantly clear as he could in *Romans 3:10* where he says: *As it is written: "None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God."* The fact is every single one of us who know Christ as Savior know him because God has elected to touch our wills, and he touched it with his grace. It was Martin Luther who pictured a portrait of our wills as beasts of burden. And this beast is going to be written and it's going to be written either by God or by the enemy. This is what Luther said. He said: "Man is like a horse. Does God leap into the saddle? The horse is obedient and accommodates itself to every movement of the rider and goes wherever he wills it. Does God throw down the reins? Then Satan leaps upon the back of the animal, which bends, goes and submits to the spurs and caprices of its new rider."

You see, those who think that God is this perfect gentleman who would never interfere in our free will forget that the enemy has already leapt into the saddle and that each and every single person born into this fallen world is born fearing and hating his creator. God's not approaching us with any sense of neutrality. He's approaching us as already blinded by the god of this world, born rebels, already predisposed to hate and fear our creator. No one seeks for God because our wills are already preset against him from birth. And that's why he says in *2 Corinthians 4: The god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from*

seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. I mean if a perfect gentleman is defined as someone who refuses to intervene in the wills of people who have been previously blinded and turned against their creator, then God isn't a perfect gentleman. And I'm thankful to God that he's not. And would a perfect gentleman leave us blinded and bound by the god of this world? Jesus says very clearly he has come to free us. He said at the very start of his public ministry in *Luke 4: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed."* That's kind of tough to imagine God restoring our sight and setting us at liberty from our oppressors without in some ways impinging on our wills. So God is not that perfect gentleman. He is, in fact, our king, our sovereign who has absolute rule and control over every single aspect of our lives.

And that leads me to my conclusion this morning. Once again, to put this into language that I use with my kids or grandkids, it's simply this: If God is the boss of the Ninevites and God is the boss of the Egyptians so much so that he can bend and turn the wills of anyone in any way direction he so chooses, then why am I not willing to believe him when he says in *Proverbs 3: Trust in*

the LORD with all of your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct your paths. Or Philippians 4 where he says: Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. Or John 14, where he says: "Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me."

Why don't we trust him? I mean I admit to you I'd be lying if I said there was never a time when I had a hard time believing that God was working all things together for my good. There are times when I thought, hey, a loving God would never do this, what he's doing to me. And there's been times where I thought that God wasn't listening or was incapable of responding or he simply just doesn't care. But time has taught me one thing over the 46 years that I've been a Christian, and that's that God is truly faithful. He's absolutely trustworthy. And he truly does love me and he wants what is the very best for me even if sometimes it directly conflicts with what I think is very best for me. And in the end it all comes down to whether or not we're willing to trust.

You know, when you stop and you think about your relationship to God, have you ever wondered, what can I give back to God? What can I give you for all that you've given to me? I mean have you ever

wondered what is the currency that God really values? Well, it's not money. I mean we know that God owns the cattle on a thousand hills. He certainly doesn't need our money. It's not buildings, and we built all of these great cathedrals and huge edifices to honor God when oftentimes it appears that we're really just honoring ourselves, and it's certainly not rituals and empty worship. Isaiah declared it in the Old Testament and Jesus repeated it the New, he said: 'THESE PEOPLE DRAW NEAR TO ME WITH THEIR MOUTH, AND HONOR ME WITH THEIR LIPS, BUT THEIR HEART IS FAR FROM ME.' So what is it that God sees as a heart that is not far from him, as a heart that is drawn to him? Well, God gives us a story to kind of illustrate what that is. Let me direct you to a story that takes place towards the end of Jesus's ministry. This is *Matthew 8:5*. Speaking of Jesus, it says: *When he had entered Capernaum, a centurion came forward to him, appealing to him, "Lord, my servant is lying paralyzed at home, suffering terribly." And he said to him, "I will come and heal him." But the centurion replied, "Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof, but only say the word, and my servant will be healed. For I too am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. And I say to one, 'Go,' and he goes, and to another, 'Come,' and he comes, and to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it." When Jesus heard this, he marveled and said to those who followed him, "Truly, I tell you, with no one in Israel have I found such faith." Luke gives an*

account of the same incident. He tells us the servant was loved by the centurion like a son and that the servant is absolutely desperate because this servant is clearly dying. So when Jesus offers to come heal the servant, this desperate man says, *"Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof, but only say the word, and my servant will be healed."* I mean he not only demonstrates exactly that he knows where he stands with God but also that his faith and his trust is so strong that he believes that Jesus has to merely say the word and his servant will be healed. It says Jesus marveled. In Greek it's the word *"thaumazo."* It's a combination of astonishment and admiration. Jesus marveled and he said, *"With no one in Israel have I found such faith."* I mean Jesus was completely unimpressed with wealth and status and rank or race, but here we see he is completely impressed with faith and trust, so impressed that he marveled.

So how about you? I mean first and foremost do you believe the gospel? Do you believe that man is fallen, incapable whatsoever of earning his way into heaven, that God himself became a man, lived a perfect life and then offered that life up on a cross so that by faith we could have his righteousness instead of our sin, so that by faith we could stand before a holy God? Do you believe that? And believing that, do you have a hard time believing that God is powerful enough or cares enough or is interested enough to move in,

through and around the people in your life who give you reason to believe that God doesn't care? And when you start thinking that, consider the Ninevites, consider the Egyptians, consider the hearts of kings. God says they're all streams of water in his hand and that he can turn those streams wherever he wants.

And so if you're struggling with some person, place or thing, you really have two choices. I mean you can believe that you're a victim of chance or circumstance tossed to and fro by every bad situation or you can trust that a sovereign God who ultimately controls the hearts and minds of every one of his creatures has allowed these difficulties to shape and mold you into the image of his Son. I mean you can throw up your hands in frustration or you can lift them in prayer, praying that God would give you the wisdom, the grace, the insight and sometimes even the stamina to be able to work out your circumstances for your good and God's glory, that you might say along with the psalmist in *Psalm 56:4*: *In God, whose word I praise, in God I trust; I shall not be afraid. What can flesh do to me?* Let's pray.

Father, I confess it's easy to preach about trusting. It's a lot harder to actually do the trusting. And Lord, I'm thankful that as I look back and I look at your word and I look at the Ninevites and I look at the Egyptians and I see this incredible power that you

have, that you can turn whole nations on a dime, that you can move in the hearts and minds and wills of people that I oftentimes think that you are subject to rather than being the authority over.

Father, give us the understanding that you rule this world, that you are the boss of everyone on this planet and that every single thing that happens, all of those people that you put into our lives that either withhold favor from us or make our lives difficult to manage, Lord, are there for a purpose and for a reason, that you can turn their hearts in an instant, Lord. And so we pray that you would give us the grace, the strength, the wisdom and the stamina to trust you when it doesn't feel like you're being trustworthy.

And I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.