

Jonah – ‘Man who lost compassion’

Reading: Jonah ch 3v10 and ch 4.

Background to the Life of Jonah

First mentioned in *2 Kings 14v25* – where he is described as a prophet of God, so clearly was fulfilling a function for God long before the story of the Great Fish.

Lived in a village called Gath Hopher on the outskirts of Nazareth.

His name means a dove, the bird of peace, this was sadly not something that he desired for the people of Ninevah, he felt they deserved destruction,

Do we seek peace? Or are we those that could start a fight with themselves? Peace is a part of the ‘fruit of the spirit’ that Paul highlights in the letter to the Ephesians and is something that should mark every child of God.

So from relative obscurity came forth this man who was destined to fulfil the will of God. To Jonahs credit at least he heard the voice of God and knew the will of God for his life, how many of us do?

Interesting that Jewish legend would have us to believe that Jonah was in fact the son of the Widow of Zaraphath that Elijah had raised from the dead. I have no scripture however to back this up.

New Testament Comparison

The book of Jonah is often compared to the book of the Acts in the New Testament as both represent the first time that the Grace of God extended beyond the land of Israel. Both also clearly show the Sovereignty of God, that he chooses who he wills.

Ananias was fearful to meet Paul following his conversion, could God really have saved a man like him?

The Saints in Jerusalem also doubted his salvation.

As difficult as Peter would find it to believe that Gentiles could be saved, we see the same in the man Jonah, how could God love his enemies those that had turned there back on him and also hated the people of God (the Jews)

Lessons from Chapters 1 to 3

- A man who hears the voice of God (ch1 v1) – wasn’t what he wanted to hear!!!
- A man who tries to run away from God (ch1v3)
- A man who prays to God (ch2v1) – sure it was a long 3 days and nights!!!
- A man who obeys God (ch3v1) – recovery is always possible.

One of the most important lessons I take from Jonah is that God does not write us off from his service, even when we disobey and try to run away from him.

‘a bruised reed shall he not break and a smoking flax shall he not quench’

How tender and caring is our God? How many of us are those bruised reeds and smoking flaxes that God longs to flame back into life.

Another lesson is that God is in control of everything and can you use anybody or anything in his service whether it be a great fish or a worm as we find in ch4. And that he can make a rebellious man into probably the most successful preacher this world has ever seen.

But are we being used by God in his service? If not why not, as there is plenty of work to do! As a body needs all its parts so each and every one of us has a function or role to play in Gods service.

Jonah Chapter 4

v1 Jonah should have been on a spiritual high, as he preaches and sees a whole city turning to God in repentance. Oh that was what our open airs were like! To Jonahs credit he preached exactly what God commanded him to do, and it is exactly what the city of Perth needs to hear over 2500 years later, that is the need to repent of sin. But here we now have Jonah;

'very angry'

Anger can sometimes be justified if its righteous anger. The Lord Jesus was angry when he saw how men had turned the temple into a place of trading, and in anger he drove the people out but note it was measured.

'scourge of small cords'

But sadly in Jonahs case there was no justification for the anger, as he had just witnessed a great work of God, had seen Gods grace demonstrated first hand. How quickly we can say things in anger that we so soon regret, we should be;

'slow to anger'

v2 Jonah now does an unusual thing and in anger decides to pray to God and to ask why? How dare we ever question the will of God even if it cuts across what our personal desires might be. It is as if he now prays to God, 'I knew this would happen!' He recognised that God was a God of mercy and grace, but how strange to dread the outcome of his service. Do we believe as Jonah did, that when we preach people can get saved.

To give Jonah some credit, clearly the Jews and Assyrians were not the best of friends, and in fact would take the people into captivity only 50 years later. So his hatred for these people was deeply set, and he just could not understand how these people could possibly be the recipients of Gods grace.

Jesus once said,

'I must needs go through Samaria'

Clearly there was no prejudice or discrimination with him when he looked on the people, and would have gone out his way to meet a woman than many others would have avoided.

Maybe your thinking we would love to see anybody saved, no matter, background, religion, race etc. But lets face it, at times we are just the same as Jonah and if only we could pick who gets saved, than these people that bring baggage and problems with them. I am glad its all about God and nothing to do with us who gets saved, why did he save you and why did he save me? It was the Sovereign will of God.

Eph 1v5 *'Having predestinated us unto the adoption of sons'*

Rom 8 *'Whom he did foreknow them he did also predestinate'*

v3 Very sad words now fall from the prophets mouth. If Ninevah is to live I would rather die. He simply cannot deal with seeing other nations other than the Jews receiving the blessing of God. His jealousy now begins to eat him up. Lets never lose sight of the fact that its Gods work we are are involved in and,

'his way is perfect'

How sad that had himself between a witness to the grace of God when he is rescued from inside the great fish.

v4 His prayer gets an answer from God, 'Is it right to be angry?' – How angry God could have been with Jonah at the lack of mercy he was willing to show to the people, and yet God speaks so tenderly to him. The attitude and meekness of Christ are what we should demonstrate in our lives.

v5 It all seems just to become too much for Jonah, this public turning to God and repentance for sin, and he quickly leaves the city.

Notice that he left by the east side of the city, remember that Adam and Eve left the Garden via the east side, Cain left to go East after killing his brother (Gen 4v16), Lot left Abraham to journey east (Gen 13v11). It would seem that travelling east is synonymous with going away from God. Remember the wise men travelled from the East to see Jesus.

So Jonah builds a booth, and sits to see what God will do? Will he really save the city? He struggles to believe that God would really save this people.

v6 The grace of God had clearly been seen in the salvation of Ninevah, and now its seen again, as the man Jonah would clearly did not deserve it, has a gourd provided by God to protect him from the elements. Even when we are in the wrong God still cares for us, and watches over us.

The gourd was just a simple plant that had broad leaves that would provide the shade from the hot eastern sun.

'Keep me as the apple of thy eye, hide me under the shadow of thy wings' (Psalm 17v9)

It is good that when the burdens of life become too much, we can indeed find shadow and comfort under his wings.

'So Jonah was exceeding glad of the gourd'

Strange things often find comfort, in Jonah's case it was a plant, a morsel of bread brought comfort, friendly speaking to Ruth did the same. In Job's case the comfort was found in silent friends, sometimes words don't help.

Are we those that bring comfort, as there are plenty of struggling saints about!

v7 As God could control the largest animal on the planet, he now controls one of the smallest when the worm comes on the scene.

How easily small things can come into our lives and steal away the joy of being saved. It wasn't a great animal, it was just a worm. Are there things in our lives no matter how small that are taking us away from God and from fellowship with him. The comfort Jonah had so wonderfully found in the gourd was so quickly taken away.

'O Lord I will praise thee: though thou wast angry with me, thine anger is turned away, and thou comfortedst me' (Is 12v1)

Jonah's comfort should have been in the Lord, not in a plant that would pass and fail him.

v8 In this verse things go from bad to worse for Jonah, not only has his gourd died, but the hot east wind begins to blow and the sun beats down on his head, and he prays to God a second time to take his life from him.

Pity that Jonah was not a bit more like Job, who having lost really everything that he had, whether it be possessions, family or even health, was able to say

'The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away, blessed be the Lord'

I think that a bit like Elijah, he was saying things that he did not really mean. I am pretty sure Jonah didn't really want to die, but the emotion of all that he had seen and all that had happened to him, just seemed too much.

v9 God once again speaks to Jonah, God it seems wanted to keep communication open with this man, and asks him a question similar to v4, 'Is it right to be angry about the gourd?'

Such a small thing had come into his life for such a short time, and here we have a man so angry that he wanted to die. A man would have lost perspective – after all that he had witnessed and the fact that he had heard the voice of God

As bad as things seemed for Jonah, God would never push him too far for him to deal with, and it's the same with us, God will never give us more trial or tribulation that we can bear, its why different people seem to suffer so different levels of trials. Paul asked God for his 'thorn in the flesh' to be removed, but God replies'

'My grace is sufficient for thee'

So when the pressures of life seem to be building and things seem to be all becoming too much, what solace that God is overlooking and will never over burden us.

v10 God now highlights to Jonah, how he has lost sight of the plan of God. Jonah mourned the loss of a plant, something he had no control over, something he had not grown, something that had been in his life for such a short time.

He showed a care and concern for the plant that he should have shown for the people.

v11 Now God goes on to speak of the mercy and why he has shown it to the people of Ninevah, as if he needed to justify himself to mortal man.

God highlights that in the city there were 120,000 who, 'did not know there right hand from there left', or in other words were too young to realise they were sinners, yet would have fallen under the judgement of God if he had not spared the city. God will not hold children under the 'age of understanding' responsible for there sin.

How sad that Jonah could not see the value in saved souls over the value of a gourd. We cannot place a value on a souls salvation, no matter the colour, creed or religion. God saves whom he chooses, I cant understand that, I simply marvel in it that he chose you and me.

Conclusion

I don't know how the story of Jonah finished, it would be good to think that having listened to God he would have returned into the city praising God for what he had done. I just have my doubts. Noah preached for nearly 100 years and saw 8 souls saved, this man preached just once and saw thousands turn to God, its just so sad that he could not have rejoiced to having been the vessel God chose to do this great work.

