

St. Paul's Dorking Sermon Notes 8th August 2010

'Creature Comforts – The Whale!'

Jonah: 1

Word: Key points from Sunday's sermon

The book of Jonah is a story about a prophet who bitterly resented the fact that God loves and cares for evil people. The book does not teach that God loves evil people because they are evil, but rather because they are human, of intrinsic worth to him in spite of their behaviour and their disregard for the true God. In chapter 1 there are 3 key themes; **trying to escape from God; God Intervenes and God Saves**

Trying to escape from God: Have you ever tried to escape from God? (Read Ps139:7 -12) My experience is that it is nigh on impossible and so it proved for Jonah (Read vs1-3). Eugene Peterson in his introduction to Jonah writes "one reason that the story is so enduringly important for nurturing the life of faith in us, is that Jonah is not a hero too high and mighty for us to identify with – he doesn't do anything great. Instead of being held up for us as an ideal to admire, we find Jonah as a companion in our ineptness. Here is someone on our level. Even when Jonah does right – like preaching, finally in Nineveh – he does it wrong – by getting angry with God." But the wonderful thing is that God is working within and around Jonah's very ineptness and accomplishing his purposes in him. Most of us need a biblical friend or two like Jonah. Jonah wouldn't have been best pleased with God at this particular assignment because as far as he was concerned the ancient superpower, Assyria was a cruel enemy of the Israelites, and Jonah a nationalistic Israelite, wanted the Assyrians harmed, not helped. Nevertheless the Lord forced Jonah to carry out this prophetic assignment and in the process taught Jonah and us, the readers of this book, that he is a God who has concerns for peoples and nations beyond his own chosen people, and nowadays, not just the Christian community. Jonah was told to love his enemies and he did the opposite – isn't that so true to life? He tried running away from the Lord because, I suspect, he knew that they would repent. Read Jonah 4:2-3. At this point Jonah still had to learn that even evil people have intrinsic worth to God

God Intervenes: Read vs7-12. The sailors threw Jonah overboard and the raging storm ceased. God's heart is to bring the people of Nineveh to repentance and freedom from punishment and He is able to use any and every means to bring this about. Not only does he use the wind and sea to bring about his purposes but as Jonah is thrown overboard God intervenes further – cf v17. This may seem a strange way for God to intervene but He will go to any lengths to save his people. Read Matthew 18: 12-14 to see the lengths God will go to. None of us deserve God to intervene on our behalf; the people of Nineveh didn't deserve it; but God is truly a shepherd who is constantly seeking the lost sheep and lambs and he will intervene by any means to bring the lost home to himself.

God Saves: cf v17 The words *the LORD provided* indicate to us that Jonah would not die but be saved. *Three days and three nights* is also a special phrase used in the ancient world with the meaning – long enough to be definitely dead. Jesus' use of the same phrase for the duration of his death before his resurrection carries a similar force. Even with miraculous signs the people would not believe who Jesus was and even today men and women refuse to believe the miracles done in his name. Read Jesus encounter with the Pharisees in Matthew 12. God provided a great fish, possibly a whale, to save Jonah. The story of Jonah is always remembered because of the whale. It's a good job that we remember the story, because it points to Jesus radical teaching, that his followers must love their enemies. Jonah needed to develop an attitude like God towards his enemies. Insistently God led Jonah to this understanding of his own mind and heart. God decided before the beginning of time to save us. He provided his own son. Luke 10 describes when Jesus was with Zacchaeus the tax collector. Jesus said to him: "*Today salvation has come to this house, ...*" ¹⁰ *For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.*" The son of man, our saviour Jesus, is still seeking to save the Lost. He hasn't stopped and he will keep on seeking to save the Lost right until the last moment of time - the time when He returns again in glory.



Witness: questions to discuss

Before discussion, read the Bible passages and ask God to help you discern what the Spirit wants to say to your group. Make sure there's plenty of room for prayer, worship and ministry.

1. Have you ever knowingly run away from God? What was the outcome?
2. Have you ever been angry with God? Did it help you to resolve your issue?
3. Why do we find it so difficult to love our enemies? What can we do to overcome this difficulty?
4. Share any experiences of God's direct intervention in your lives and how this strengthened your faith.
5. Do you think the story of Jonah is literally true? If not, does it matter?
6. Spend some time praying together for those you believe to be lost and in need of rescuing.