Jonah A brief look

Description

A brief look at the little book of Jonah.

Can I encourage you to familiarise yourself with the story before we start.

First of all letâ??s get an overview.

1. Jonah was a prophet, an Israelite born to Amittai from Gath-Hepher (a few miles north of Nazareth) who knew His God. Jonah knew Him to be gracious, merciful, slow to anger, abundant in loving kindness, one who repents (repents in older translations, relents or turns away from in modern translations) from doing harm (Jonah 4:2).
2. Nineveh was a powerful city on the banks of the Tigris river. It was on the opposite bank to the modern city of Mosul in Iraq. The city was a powerful, influential place. It was a centre for the cult and false god Ishtar that used temple prostitution and other sexually immoral practices. This was a place where greed and self indulgence reigned supreme. Nineveh was in Assyria. Israel and Assyria did not get along, they were enemies.
3. Jonah was asked by God to go to Nineveh. Jonah decided to go the other way.
4. God rescued him through a storm and a fish and gave him the opportunity to repent and find His promises to be true. God gave him a second chance.
5. Jonah resented what God did and was more concerned for himself than those that God wanted to save.

Chapter 1

Jonah 1:2 â?? â??Go to Nineveh, their wickedness has come before meâ?• God was looking for a messenger to take His word and message of salvation to a people group that had been so taken up with themselves that they did not even know their right hand from their left. A people that God had recognised were ripe and ready to receive the good news of salvation.

Jonah 1:3 â?? Jonah decided that the job was not for him and went in the opposite direction. He turned 180 degrees and walked away from God and the city of Nineveh. He then â??found a ship and paid the fareâ?•, in reality what he did was he chartered a ship going to Tarshish which is on the west coast of Spain on the Atlantic, in other words he said to the captain â??what is the priceâ?• and effectively says â??how far will it take

meâ?•. Jonah was on the run from God and the task he had been entrusted with.

What is interesting in the next few verses is that God sent a storm. Quite often we find ourselves in a storm and we think that the storm will engulf us and drag us down, yet in many cases God allows the storm to save us. So the very thing that could destroy us is Godâ??s plan to save us. What we also see in Jonah 1:5 is that the sailors, the conditioned mariners, were so scared they were crying out to their gods to save them, gods who never answered, but it is always what we do in a crisis, cry out for help, even if it is to the wrong god. They were throwing the cargo overboard, the very things that had value no longer have value. Our lives are like this, we suddenly find ourselves in a storm and in a position where we have to re-evaluate our lives and throw the things that are of value, the things that obstruct us from worshipping God, or hinder our walk with Him, overboard. In our story we have men who do not believe in a living God yet have some kind of reverence and understanding of Jonahâ??s God, a God who has a reputation of being a mighty God, a God who saves and rescues His people. The stories were around and they had heard them but had never been in a situation or recognised the need to make a choice.

Another question for us to ask is where was Jonah while all this was going on? He was in the hold of the ship, in relative safety and unaware of what was going on up on deck. I hope as Christians we are not like that, buried in the hold of the ship while others are fighting for survival? Eventually Jonah was found by the captain and instructed to call on his God and it is only then that Jonah came clean and told the crew that he was a Hebrew who feared the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land. It was at this point that the crew became even more afraid than before, they obviously had some understanding of the God of the Hebrews and asked â??Why have you done this?â?• They then cried and said â??what shall we do?â?• (much the same as when, in Acts 2:37 the people who heard Peter preach cried out and said what shall we do?). When a man or woman is convicted of their sin and their utter depravity in the light of almighty God there is only one cry that can be uttered, â??What shall we do?â?•, I hope, like Jonah we have an answer. Jonahâ??s answer was throw me overboard, he knew he was the cause of all the trouble and this was the answer, get rid of the trouble so others could be saved. What we find is that the crewmen could not throw him overboard and the text says they rowed even harder. They were full of compassion for Jonah and did not want to see him perish so continued to put their own lives at risk. Eventually they succumbed and realised that they had to adhere to Jonah who they perceive had the word of the Lord for the situation.

What is interesting in this part of the story is that this is not how it should be, the godless ones,the crew, who are busy trying to save lives and call on their gods for salvation, gods like David Beckham, George Clooney, Barack Obama or whoever or whatever is

the idol of the moment. Jonah should be the one calling on his God, the one reaching out for the lost and hurting, he really should be expecting some answers.

Jonah appeared to be complacent when he should have been calling on God for release for himself and the crew. Sometimes as Christians we become so wrapped up in our own little world that we become complacent when we are expected to intercede on behalf of others.

What happened next is quite amazing, Jonah 1:14 tells us that the sailors, who had now sucombed to Jonahâ??s advice and were about to throw him overboard, now start to cry out to Jonahâ??s God, the living God, for salvation and redemption and even acknowledge that Jonahâ??s God, has orchestrated all this for His own reason and purpose.

In Jonah 1:15 Jonah was thrown overboard by a crew of fearful men, men who had been reduced to quivering wrecks because of Jonahâ??s disobedience. The moment of release comes when men (and women) obey God and throw the offensive thing overboard, the storm is immediately stilled. The crew then praise God and vow to serve the living God, the almighty God (Jonah 1:16) and God brings about revival and repentance despite Jonahâ??s disobedience.

This part of the passage tells us that God is not restricted by our weakness or disobedience. He will work out His salvation with us or without us but it is so much better for our well being if we walk with Him rather than heading in the wrong direction.

We read that God is the God of the second chance (I am so thankful He is, what about you?) and provides a rescue plan, a plan involving a fish, God is quite resourceful, he has used donkeys, doves and ravens to provide help in the past.

So a fish, and inside at that, probably not the most pleasant place to be but seeing it was God who orchestrated it then it was probably the safest place to be. So inside a fish, not knowing how long you are going to be there, what do you do? Do you blame God, do you blame yourself, do you become self indulgent? What do you do? What Jonah did was amazing, he recited some Psalms. When I first realised this I thought to myself do I know enough Psalms to recite for three days, or however long I am in this â??fishâ?? waiting for God to get me out. What I think this tells us is that we all need to read and remember the scriptures so that we can at least rise to the occasion when required. What is evident is that Jonah was repentant and God had compassion and ordered the fish to unceremoniously â??spitâ?? him out. What a relief, Jonah could now get on with his life, lesson learnt, repentant and redeemed, or was he?

Lets move into chapter 3

The second chance, â??get up, go and deliver the word I have given youâ?• Jonah 3:1. So off Jonah set, probably in fear and trembling but with expectancy. We are told that Nineveh was a great city, three days journey to get across it, thatâ??s going to take a lot of words. I hope God has planned a big speech for him!

Jonah 3:4 tells us the message that God gave Jonah was â??forty days and Nineveh will be destroyedâ?•. Some message that is. This wonâ??t take Jonah long or else he will get decidedly bored saying the same thing for three days.

Jonah 3:5 tells us that on hearing these few words, Nineveh repented and revival spread through the city. Even the king came on board and the whole city joined together in a fast and penance for their wicked ways. It does seem that Nineveh was ready and waiting for God to intervene. When God calls us we need to heed His call as we really do not know what God will do with our obedience. We have learnt that God is not hindered by disobedience but also honours obedience and what we see is that God repents, or if you like, changes His mind and decides not to proceed with the destruction He said He would.

In Jonah 4 we find that Jonah was not pleased about the situation and change of heart and became quite angry. He knew all along that God was merciful, just and full of compassion and would relent if the people of Nineveh, by chance did repent. So what did he do? He took his bat and ball home and went and sat outside the city and waited to see what would happen. My question is where should he have been? I suggest he should have been in the city discipling the converts and encouraging them in their new found faith and helping them to learn the requirements of a changed life. But No, here he was outside the city thinking more about himself than others. Despite all of this God was still with him and while he was still complaining a plant sprang up beside him to shelter him from the sun, Jonah was thankful, but the next day along came a worm. The passage tells us God caused it to come and eat away at the plant and then we are told God caused an east wind to come and so the midday sun become so intense Jonah felt like dying, in fact dying would be better. He still had suicidal tendencies and really does not appear to have learnt the lesson that it is better to be in Godâ??s will and plan than outside it. This part of the passage, on initial examination, appears to show God as unjust and unmerciful to a solitary man who finds it hard to accept Godâ??s plan for him. The truth is Jonah had a choice, God was going to save Nineveh with or without Jonah so it would have been better for Jonah to capitulate and change his mindset about how God should work and accept that God is God and can do whatever he wants, however He wants and whenever He wants. What He desires is that we accompany Him on this journey and witness the exceptional happenings on the way.

God had compassion on a grand scale and the writer ends the story with these verses (Jonah 4:10-11) *Then the Lord said , â??You feel sorry about the plant, though you did nothing to put it there. It came quickly and died quickly. But Nineveh has more than 120,000 people living in spiritual darkness, not to mention all the animals. Shouldnâ??t I feel sorry for such a great city?â?•*

In conclusion I would like to suggest that:-

1. It is better to be involved in Godâ??s great plan of salvation than not to be involved.
2. It is better to be less self indulgent and more compassionate to others.
3. We need to recognise the need, whether spiritual or physical.
4. Redeem our time effectively.

Ephesians 5:15-20 (NLT)

Make the most of every opportunity in these evil days. Donâ??t act thoughtlessly, but understand what the Lord wants you to do. Donâ??t be drunk with wine, because that will ruin your life. Instead, be filled with the Holy Spirit, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, and making music to the Lord in your hearts. And give thanks for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

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Category

1. Characters
2. Jonah

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