

## **Reading:** Jonah 1

### **Theme:** A Pagan's Rebuke!

It was said of the Canadian Mounties that they always get their man, I suppose now it should be - they always get their person! In other words they are relentless in their pursuit of a fugitive from justice. As we have looked at Jonah and we have seen he was a fugitive from God and from what God wanted him to do. His mission and commission were very definite and clear, but instead of going to Nineveh to preach against it, Jonah did all he could to go in the opposite direction and he headed off to Tarshish! From his point of view, he had successfully resigned his commission and ran away - as God had not stopped him. Yet God was going to get His man, His prophet. This wayward, fugitive, runaway prophet was going to be God's servant to Nineveh no matter what! God would not allow Jonah to escape and God would work in a way to show His power, glory and fulfil His purposes.

God would intervene in the self-complacent life of the rebellious prophet and would put His finger upon Jonah. We saw last time how God's finger could be seen *in the storm* - it was no chance happening of nature, but God sent (hurled) the wind and caused a storm. God's finger could also be traced in *the sailors' fear* as these seamen were terrified and each cried to their gods to intervene and help them. Not only did they pray seriously and desperately, but they took extraordinary measures in throwing their cargo overboard, even if it was their livelihood, their hope for the future, their money, but compared to their lives it was worthless and useless. They knew that to stand a chance of living, it had to be jettisoned, thrown overboard.

There's also third way in which the finger of God is to be seen in these events. Before we come to it, let's just stand back and **consider Jonah a moment or two.** What was he doing? There were the sailors, experienced seamen, who would been through many storms and dangers, but in this storm, they were afraid and praying to their gods; also, they did all they could to keep the boat afloat, but Jonah, what a sad sight, he was fast asleep below deck and totally unaware of the storm, totally oblivious to the fact that death was only a short time away. He was sleeping like a baby; nothing disturbed his peace. Some suggest he snored loudly; drowning out the noise of the storm - one translation of the captain's words in v6 (LXX) is "*Why dost thou snore?*"

If we looked at Jonah asleep in the storm and we knew nothing else about him, we may think that there was a man at peace. He must have had peace of heart and mind to be a landlubber on board a ship, be able to be sleep in such a storm! Yet we know Jonah had been agitated and anxious in heart and mind, had been on the go as he ran from God, was maybe even afraid to sleep while still in Israel - in case God spoke to him in dreams, but to his mind everything had worked out and seemed God had let him do as he planned, as it seemed God would not use him to go to Nineveh so they be spared and used to punish Israel. Jonah felt secure, at peace, a peace ruled in his heart in his course of action and he would be able to tell his people that one day.

This evening I want to urge us to be careful of the significance we place on our feelings. Many have been deceived by such.

In the Bible we see King Saul was feeling good when he offered sacrifices before a battle; King Ahab felt exhilarated when he first claimed Naboth's vineyard after it had been falsely and violently obtained; Judas Iscariot felt great when he received his money for betraying Jesus, but all of them were wrong to rely on their feelings. King Saul's peace was shattered when he met Samuel; Ahab's peace evaporated when he met Elijah; and Judas' peace was transformed to great grief and desperation when he saw something of the enormity of what he had done. We're not to assume our fickle feelings determine whether or not we are doing the will of God. It is so easy to fool ourselves, delude ourselves into doing things for our own convenience, to suit our attitudes, desires and circumstances, especially when, like Jonah, we go against what God has said.

I wonder how many people have excused all sorts of things because it felt right in the circumstances, it felt good or did not disturb their peace. For us all, we are to be careful of being ruled by our feelings, especially feelings of inner peace; first and foremost, we are to listen to what the word of God teaches and do it. The basis of our peace must be in accordance with what God's word teaches, and not just what we would want for ourselves.

Jonah had inner peace, but had it at the time he was running from God! He could feel at peace because he had hardened his heart and was not going to be troubled by the inconvenience of what God had said. Neither the noise outside, nor the guilt within would keep him awake or wake him up. We are to realise sin so easily causes us to be

insensitive to many things; it will dull our hearts to what God wants and requires of us; it will cause us to suppress His voice and to ignore His word; to stuff our ears, hearts and minds so that we cannot hear what God is saying to us. I wonder if anyone is like that this evening? I suppose if we were, we would not be listening to what God is saying to us through His word or this sermon anyway; and we would be able to ignore it, be able to fill our minds with other thoughts and even thinking the preacher is speaking of someone else and certainly not you!

If we are like Jonah, sleeping in the midst of a storm sent by God, even though others may fear in the things happening around us, then God may be putting His finger upon our life and maybe He will do so in the third way we've been approaching and now come to – as we also see God's finger upon Jonah:

### **3. In the Rebuke of the Heathen Captain.** (v6)

The captain and his crew had prayed, had thrown their cargo overboard and someone remembered the passenger who had come aboard at Joppa. It could have been that the captain had gone to see him, to give him an assurance that they were doing all they could to save the boat, perhaps even to warn him that he was to expect the ship to sink. He may have gone to tell him *"Be prepared to die, it's only a matter of time!"* Can we imagine his shock and amazement that this landlubber was fast asleep and possibly snoring! His words are those of amazement (NIV) *"How can you sleep?"* or as AV says *"What meanest thou, O sleeper?"*

Jonah was rebuked because he was asleep - sleeping instead of helping, sleeping instead of working to keep the boat afloat! He was asleep and the captain rebuked him not only for this, but also because of his lack of prayer! This is a sad scene, as it seems Jonah was down at one of his lowest points. Jonah may have felt he could not have gone any lower when he ran away from his commission and his God, yet he was wrong. For here he hit rock bottom as the prophet of God was rebuked by a heathen sea captain!

Jonah well deserved this rebuke. He was not in the way of duty; in fact he was far from it and on the run, not being where he should be. Instead of being on his way to Nineveh, he was out of the way going to Tarshish which was the opposite direction. Instead of being able to boldly proclaim God, be able to testify to the keeping power of the Lord, Jonah was hidden, out of sight. While others prayed to their false gods and the storm raged on, Jonah slept in the hold! Jonah was disobedient and his disobedience sapped him of his willingness, desire and ability to witness for the Lord or even to pray.

The heathen captain's words must have cut deep into Jonah *"Get up and call on your god!"* Maybe the captain thought that if Jonah could sleep at such a time as that, he must have had a great relationship and great confidence in his God and so he was to call on Him. Sadly Jonah could not pray at that time, probably he didn't want to. He had put the barriers up, he had disobeyed the Lord and he had turned his back on God and His people; so how could he pray? Perhaps the captain was fooled by the outward appearance of the situation, but he

would soon learn the truth. When the apostle Paul was being taken as a prisoner to Rome, he too was on board a ship caught in the midst of an awful storm, but he was able to pray and to know the true peace of God, to have his God near him and his God sent an angel to encourage him. Yet Jonah could not pray even though in similar life-threatening circumstances.

God had put his finger on Jonah most directly by the rebuke of this heathen sea captain. What an irony, Jonah would never have been on board the ship if he had not disobeyed God and the heathen sea captain was used to rebuke Jonah and to point him back to his true God and the need to pray, perhaps this drove home the need for his repentance.

When the true position came out only a short while later, the sailors and captain were terrified (v10) as it was known he was a servant of the Lord, had been for years, but he was going against what God had said. It caused the others to be terrified and yet the rebuke the captain gave was a true and proper rebuke. Surprisingly rebukes and encouragements to Christians can come from the most unlikely of people, sometimes even those who have no time for God at all!

What about us? Are we prepared to take a word of rebuke, even from an unexpected source? There are many who do not believe in God and they would listen to many people, to those who were a good friend, mate, but they may not take advice or listen to many of us who are Christians. They feel we do not understand them, their thinking, and that we are all pie in the sky. They would rather listen to a mate down the pub, or a neighbour, especially if we were to talk to them about God

and the Bible. If they were willing to listen I hope and pray they would hear that which is right said to them about the situation. Regrettably there are Christians who feel that they would not listen to anyone except.... Sometimes as Christians we are unteachable, because we are not willing to listen to anyone as we feel we've been a Christian for so long, we know this or that; we've read great things, perhaps we have done this or that, yet we can go on in a stubborn way against God and His will.

We need to listen and all of us need to realise that God can speak to us, encourage or rebuke us through the most unlikely people e.g. King David was spoken harshly to by Joab who was the commander-in-chief of his army as he wept and mourned over his son Absalom. Others have also been rebuked by unlikely ones e.g. Baalam by his donkey; David by Abigail who was the wife of his enemy, as well as giants of the faith being told off by other giants of the faith - Peter was rebuked by Paul.

We are never too great or mighty to learn, especially to learn of God. If we will not obey God's word, then we resist to our peril and God can put His hand, put His finger upon our lives and bring us back to obey His word. This evening if someone is running away from God's call to surrender their life to Him for the first time and make the Lord Jesus their Saviour, then I would urge you to stop running, stop resisting and seek God willingly. It could be that we as a believer are resisting God's will for us in our lives, in an area or areas of our lives and if so, we need to tell Him, to confess it, seek His forgiveness which will be freely, lovingly given and we are to seek

guidance from His word for our life. It is tragic that so many Christians let their witness be ruined in many ways, as they let their zeal and love become cold towards both God and His people and they seek their own way and desires.

For us all, we are to seek God and seek Him to take notice of us, if we're not a Christian - that we will not perish and we ask God that if He has His hand, His finger on our life then we would take note of it, but also note His finger will be pointing us to the old rugged Cross, on which the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ died in our place, where He was condemned for our sin, took our punishment so that we need not perish for all eternity, but we would have eternal life. I pray that this night we would all seek to be right with God and when we are, that we go on and always walk in step with His will and word and we would live right lives with one another as God's people.