

## **Reading:** Jonah 4

**Theme:** Desiring Death.

Over the years there have been outbreaks of foot and mouth disease in UK, the last major one was in 2007. Some of us may still remember the graphic scenes of piles of animals being burned. There is a human version of it which is usually caught by children - hand, foot and mouth disease and requires little treatment and usually passes within seven days. A worse “version” of foot and mouth disease occurs in so many people as they can open their mouth and put their foot in it! It is easy to do, we don't think; or we do think, but don't care and speak perhaps in a temper or in a quick response to something that has been done or said and we show the symptoms of this foot and mouth ‘disease’!

So far in this chapter we have seen something of **1. Jonah's Anger** as he resented God's kindness and mercy to the city and people of Nineveh. Last week we saw **2. Jonah's Complaint** - the outworking of this anger as he complained, moaned to God. He did so under **a. the form of prayer**, in which he not only complained, but **b. tried to justify his disobedience** and **c. even reproached God** as to His righteous character in sparing such an awful and wicked place as Nineveh. We can be like Jonah and our prayers have strong overtones of Jonah's attitude and praying. It may not be openly, but we could question why God allowed this or that to happen, or why He didn't do this instead and we generally moan and complain as to what He has done.

Jonah was taken up with wrong reasoning regarding God's work in Nineveh. Jonah viewed the mercy to, and the sparing of Nineveh as a token of the inevitable. The people in his beloved homeland had not repented, yet had been sent God's prophets

for the past 150 years or so, but Nineveh repented in comparatively a very few days - they fasted, sought God to spare them and He did so. Jonah may have reasoned that God's blessing was going to shift from his homeland to the Gentiles and he did not like it one bit. In fact, he was downright angry at such thoughts. In his anger, resentment and complaining he then turned in prayer and asked to die. This was a foolish, solemn and serious thing to pray! We will focus this evening on:

### **3. Jonah's Desire for Death** (v3)

Jonah had strange reasoning and this led to a miserable cry and prayer. Incredibly it is from a man who was a believer in the Lord, a prophet who had been singularly blessed and used by God. This shows something of the turmoil of his heart and mind. His heart and mind were not in tune, in sync with the will of God and he had let his own prejudices tarnish, diminish his desire for God's will to be done completely. He could not accept God was going to spare Nineveh. It perplexed and confused him. This confusion of heart led him to anger, to complain against God, to rebel and sin.

Sadly, such false reasoning also brought about a change of attitude towards himself. It might have gone something like this *"Look at me, I expected Nineveh destroyed, then I could go back and preach my own people and they would listen. It looks like I'm useless, washed up and who would have time for me? Why I came here I don't know. I wasn't needed; the Ninevites could so easily have been spared without me. My standing as a prophet, as well as the sureness and reliability of the Lord's word is ruined. I'm fit for nothing."* This could have resulted in feeling it was better for him to die than to live. Now Jonah felt his usefulness was over and it seems he would rather die than see

God show mercy to Nineveh - he may have felt there wasn't enough mercy for both Israel and Nineveh! Jonah imagined he was washed up, unfit to serve God or His people again and useless to any living creature.

I wonder if there have been times in our lives when we have wished to die, when we felt we couldn't take any more of all that life had thrown at us, or the mess we had made of our life, or the trials, struggles, pains and the lows we had experienced and we just wanted to lie down, go to sleep and never wake up again? Perhaps to a lesser extent we may have wanted to give up in this or that project, work, or involvement in such things at least. It may be that it was because there was a sense of being useless, of being a burden to family, friends, society, or the church we are in and we were no longer needed by anyone. If we ever felt like that, then we are to realise many have felt like it, even those who are believers. We have examples of such in the Bible - we see Jonah; Elijah also wanted to lie down and die. As we look at Jonah here - he felt a has-been, with no future; his reputation falling down before his eyes, he had no hope and what was the purpose of going on.

Perhaps someone this evening may have felt, or is feeling like this! How does the Bible deal with such a desire? How should we answer those who sadly speak of suicide, or euthanasia, death with dignity? The Bible clearly shows us that it is God's prerogative to end life when He knows is right. Yet people want to continue to rebel and want to take God's place in deciding when to end their own life or the lives of others. Their point of view is they would treat human beings as mere animals and administer the drugs or whatever to cause life to end and allow them to die well. The meaning of the word "euthanasia" =

"dying well". Personally, I'm all for people dying well - dying ready to face their Maker, at peace with Him through the saving work of the Lord Jesus and that is the **ONLY** way a person can ever die well – whether dying suddenly, after a long illness or die without pain or in much pain.

Human beings are much more than just animals. This is just not because we can talk, design, laugh, weep or have remarkable abilities. It is because God has made us in His likeness, with an eternal soul. When a person would take their own life or the life of another to rid them of pain and troubles, because they have low or no quality of life, then they expect everything to cease, to be free from pain and a poor quality of life. Yet that is not the case if they are not right with God. The Bible tells us solemn, serious and graphic truths about what happens after death. Our awareness, our feelings, our senses do not end at that point of death and neither does the real us cease to be. The Bible speaks of eternity for our eternal souls - where things are known and felt so much more intensely than we could ever feel or know here on earth. For those who do not know God, death takes them to the day of their judgement (*not the Day of Judgement*), but they are confronted with God and until the Day of Judgement their souls are condemned to a place called hell that is pictured as a place of indescribable pain and trouble that never ends. Tell me is that dying well? Pains and troubles should drive us to seek God and the Saviour He has provided; to seek to find the help only He can give, but to lose our eternal souls and suffer eternal torments is false reasoning and not dying well.

As believers we should desire to tell all people how to die well by a personal trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, no matter their situations in life. I know it's not a simple matter of believing in

Jesus and everything will be OK, but within the gospel there is a transforming power, which should alter our view of our personal worth. Human reason alone can say we are worthless in the eyes of society and even God's eyes. We can think of God as great, majestic; we can be aware of His power, purity and can compare ourselves to Him and we find we are small, useless, insignificant and may conclude we are worthless. We can feel God doesn't need us, our talents, gifts, money, our working – which is true - the Bible clearly shows us that. Yet the Bible also shows us that God loves and cares for ones such as us and He has seen fit to care, to love, even to use us in His wise purposes! We have two parallel principles here - He does not need us in terms of what we can do or add to Him, yet He graciously uses us in the outworking of **His** plans for humanity.

The gospel shows us God so loved the world - including you and me. So far from being worthless we are told there is a love within God's heart and Being for people like us. Not only that, but He wants us to know His love personally, know His forgiveness, pardon, peace and care. Incredibly He wants us to be His children and not only His children, but His heirs, even joint heirs with Christ Jesus. The gospel elevates our standing and we see that not only does God value and view us as precious, but that is to affect our own view of ourselves - we are not worthless, but we have a great value and love set upon us. We are to have a sense of dignity through the work and love of God toward, in and upon us. The price God paid for us makes us beyond price - as He gave the life of heaven's best, His beloved Son the Lord Jesus Christ.

If we were useless, if we had no useful purpose as people, especially as Christians, God Himself would remove us from

the face of time. As we get older, or may get a long-term illness, we may feel that we are not needed, but God has a need of us, has purposes still to be fulfilled in and through our lives. We need to remember that we too like Jonah can be filled with self-pity, even filled with resentment against God and His dealings with us in our lives. None of us knows what God will achieve in and through us at this point in time or even in the future, as long or short as it may be for us. We may be called to suffer and never know why, yet God can teach us and others through such sufferings. Perhaps God will allow us to go through dark times, yet He knows the glorious light He has for us at the other end of such darkness. Having God as our Father through having the Lord Jesus as our Saviour does not mean it will be easy in our lives, or necessarily pleasant, but if we are His child, we know He will never cause us a needless tear.

Jonah was full of self-pity and anger brought on by a wrong view of the Lord and His ways. Jonah wanted, expected and demanded, **his own way** and when his pet plans were not fulfilled, he sank into a paranoid whirlpool of self-pity and a sense of worthlessness. Through his prejudices he tried to straight jacket God's will and purposes, tried to confine the Almighty God to a box of his own reasoning and insight. Jonah, and we, should let God be God! He is beyond our highest thought and beyond human understanding. Even His supposed folly is greater than all of Mankind's presumed wisdom. His ways are past finding out and His lowest thoughts are as high above our highest thoughts as the heavens are above the earth.

Poor Jonah was angry in his own false unfounded conclusions about God, but as I have said before, we can so easily be like Jonah. We can pray in anger, in a temper, also pray for things

that are not only foolish, but can be positively and practically harmful to us. Jonah's prayer was not answered in the positive - because of God's love and mercy! God answered Jonah's first prayer and delivered him from the fish's belly, but now He does not deliver him into the folly of this request. Thankfully God really knows which prayers are right to answer, knows how and when to answer our prayers as well! In heaven we will be so grateful for answered and especially for unanswered prayers!

Our God does work all things together for good to those who love Him, to those who are called according to His purpose. God knows our attitude of heart and mind when we pray and takes such into account in the answering of our prayers. Here He knew Jonah was heated, resentful, short sighted, and thankfully He dealt gently with Jonah - as I hope we will see next time. We can be thankful God does not answer our unthinking, foolish prayers as we would want them there and then. Woe betides the world if ever there was a real genie of the lamp who answered every wish and desire of even the most noblest person!

Jonah instead of wishing for death should have submitted to God's plan and purposes. Yes, he would still have seen the difficulties, especially to return home and continue his ministry after being an apparent failure in Nineveh. Yet it was his privilege to know God and to ask for His keeping, guidance and strength; for God to make His path plain and clear before him. Instead, Jonah took it upon himself to judge the work of God, concluding that the salvation of Nineveh would mar, hinder God's honour and discredit his own ministry, maybe even harden the hearts of his precious countrymen and so he desired death rather than life as a way out of seeing all this.

Tonight, I've mentioned dying well, but God's salvation is just not for dying well, because it is more for and about living well. It can give hope, worth, dignity, light and new life. It is like being born again when we come to know the Lord Jesus as our own Saviour – which is the phrase Jesus uses concerning coming to know Him as our Saviour - born-again. We hear of "*born-again Christians*" - but in reality, there is no such thing as a Christian who is not born again! Yes, people may be good, religious, kind, nice, respectable, even greatly influenced by the Bible and Christian things, but unless they have been converted, saved, born-again, then they are not Christians in the NT sense of the word.

Tonight, are we all living well and so ready to die well - because we have been born-again of God by trusting the Lord Jesus as our Saviour? Or are we hopeless - no hope in life and certainly no hope in death? The Lord Jesus came to give life and hope, we need to trust Him, then live for Him and for His glory so that when the time comes for us to pass from time into eternity, no matter the physical circumstances by which it occurs, then we would die well and go to the glorious hope that God has prepared for His people and live eternally joyful in heaven, delighting in, totally enjoying all the Triune God has prepared for us in and through the Lord Jesus.