

Armagh Baptist Church
Sunday 1st August 2010 – 6:30pm
'The Purposes of God & the Call of Jonah'
Jonah 1:1-16

Introduction

I love the book of Jonah. I think this is my third time to preach through it. I think we can all identify with Jonah – the reluctant preacher – or the runaway preacher. The man who thought he could run away from God! If you've ever felt like running away from anything, then this book is for you.

I believe it is possible to discover God's Will for your life, step by step, but sometimes it is so difficult to know what it is God wants you to do, because the way ahead is so often blurred by our emotions, our feelings and our own wills raising their rebellious heads at times. Our wills aren't as dead as they ought to be sometimes – and that's why knowing God's Will becomes difficult!

We need to continually surrender ourselves to Jesus Christ and to accept his right to be Lord of every part of our lives. I can assure you that I know what it's like to stand in Jonah's sandals. The first time I preached through the book of Jonah was 20 years ago at the end of my year as an assistant pastor in Portadown. I had applied to go to France with Baptist Missions, but at the same time I had been asked by a new church, Mullaghmeen Baptist Church in Co Fermanagh, to become their part-time pastor.

I didn't know what to do: to go to France or Fermanagh.

So I proceeded with my application with BM to go to France, which was going to take about 9 months to process, but in the meantime I went to Mullaghmeen and started to work for them, supposedly for a few months. But no sooner had I started there than people began to get saved, others needed to be discipled, and before long I had worked myself into plenty of ministry in Fermanagh, so much so that Baptist Missions told me to stay where I was until God led me out of it. Within 2 years we had also planted a new church across the border in Cavan, so there was no way I could go to France by then. But that hasn't left me at times wondering throughout my life: What if I had gone to France? What if I hadn't gone to Fermanagh?

France has continued to feature regularly in my life since, but every step of the way God has confirmed his presence with me in all the other places I have served him. But I do know how Jonah felt – called to go to Nineveh, but he went in the opposite direction to Tarshish. I thought I was called to go to France, but in the end I went in the opposite

direction to Fermanagh.

I want each of you to try to think yourselves into Jonah's shoes tonight. I want you to know what it's like to stand in Jonah's sandals as well... The key is not to think of Jonah as a disobedient preacher or missionary, but to think of him as a disobedient child of God, so that each of us here tonight can begin to identify with him. I think that will help you to get the most out of these studies over the next 4 Sunday nights.

We see in Jonah ch.1 that God is a God of purpose, and that nothing can thwart his purposes being fulfilled. God is a God of Mission – His Mission is to redeem a people for himself. But we can all fit into that purpose as well.

1. God had a Purpose for Jonah to Fulfill (vs.1-2)

(This would have been *God's Perfect Will* for Jonah's life).

God's overall purpose is to redeem people from every nation, but God has an individual purpose for each one of our lives – a part for us to play in his overall plan of redemption.

God had a purpose for Jonah to fulfill - a specific task for him to do. What was it? (Read vs.1-2)

It was to go to preach to the Great City of Nineveh. That was God's will for Jonah at that particular time in his life. When God reveals his will to us as clearly as he did to Jonah, you can be sure that God has done his homework and that God's will is the right thing to do.

(i) Jonah was the right man for the job. (See 2 Kings 14:23-27)

Jonah had prophesied to a wicked king before (v.24)

His prophecy had come true (v.25)

So Jonah had been faithful, and used of God before.

(ii) It was the right time for this job to be done.

He was being sent to Nineveh, which was the capital city of Assyria, Israel's enemy at this point in history. Assyria had just gone through a time of affluence and greatness, but now between 800 and 750 years before Christ, she was in a bit of a recession.

This was the time that they were most likely to listen to Jonah's message. Within 50 years God was going to use Assyria to scatter the people of Israel off into exile, so God's timing was perfect as far as the people of Nineveh were concerned. The ruins of Nineveh are to be found today in Northern Iraq – the

City of Mosul.

(iii) But Jonah had his faults – just like all of us.

He was bigoted, patriotic, selfish, disobedient, short-tempered, prejudiced, narrow-minded – but despite all of that, God could still use him! And God wanted to use him for a very important job right there and then.

Application: Maybe you have your faults, maybe you're far from perfect, but maybe God has something that He wants you to do.

I believe that if you're a Christian, then God does have something for you to do. He has a plan and a purpose for your life. You can fit into God's overall purpose for this world in which he was placed you!

I wonder have you asked him what His purpose for your life is yet?

Stop wasting your life – Ask God what He wants you to do with it.

'Only one life, 'twill soon be past, only what's done for Christ will last'

Remember, when God calls you, his timing is perfect.

We've seen what God's purpose for Jonah was.

We've seen what God's perfect will for Jonah was.

But Jonah got scared and ran the other way – (v.3)

2. God had a purpose in allowing Jonah to board the ship to Tarshish (vs.3-7)

(Some might call this *God's Permissive Will*)

God doesn't force us to do anything, but he has a way of teaching us that what he wanted us to do in the first place, was the best way!

God let Jonah get away. He *permitted* Jonah to run away.

Jonah decided he was going in the opposite direction – to Tarshish, Spain.

He wasn't going to Nineveh, in the territory of Assyria!

So he sets out to walk the 80 miles from his home to the Port of Joppa.

He had already decided he was going to Tarshish, at the other end of the Mediterranean Sea, and 'what do ye know' when he arrived at the Port, there was a ship heading to Tarshish – exactly the place he wanted to go!

What a stroke of 'good luck' - some might call it!

The door to Tarshish could have been closed - but it wasn't!

This was an open-door! And yet it wasn't God's Will for Jonah!

There is a note of warning here for us!

Yes, God usually does guide us by closing some doors he doesn't want us to go through, and only opening the one door that he does want us

to take.

But it's not always like that! If we *want* to rebel against God, disobey him – we can usually find somewhere to go

The road to rebellion isn't *always* a difficult one!

The road into sin isn't always hard to find – temptation is all around us!

The road to a backslidden state is often so easy, you don't realize you've gone through the door until you realize God seems far away! But if God seems far away from you this evening; guess who's moved? It wasn't God – it was you!

Let me ask you, are you as close to God today as you used to be?

Are you a back-slider?

How concerned are you about going God's way in your life, anyway?

Or are you just content to go your own way through life?

God has his own way of teaching us what's best!

3. God had a purpose in sending the storm (vs.6-9)

(To convict Jonah of his disobedience)

If you're not going God's way, then you're going your own way, and your own way isn't just slightly off course, it's 180 degrees off course!

In other words you are going in the opposite direction to God's Way – just like Jonah was!

To go God's way again, what do you have to do?

You must stop running away from God.

You must turn right around 180 degrees.

You must make a 'U-turn' and go the other direction.

The Bible has a big word for it – it's called **Repentance!**

If tonight finds you going your own way and not God's way then you must repent! Because going your own way is **SIN!**

Isaiah 53:6 – *'We all like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way, and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.'*

Going your own way is sin. It is outright disobedience against God. It is sin!

Jonah had to realize that running away from God's Purpose for his life was serious. He had to realize it was outright disobedience. He had to come to realize that he had sinned! And that was why God had sent the storm – it was to bring Jonah to his senses, so that he would realize he had disobeyed God!

Read from vs.3-7 – Jonah was found out!

Notice:

(v.5b) – Even though Jonah was disobedient, he could still fall fast asleep – his conscience doesn't seem to be bothering him yet!

(v.6) – Everybody else was praying – but backslider Jonah couldn't! Backsliders don't get through to God until they come confessing their sins.

(v.7) – 'Be sure your sins will find you out!'

He was convicted of his sins – v.9, v.10b, v.12b.

It took the storm in Jonah's life to bring him to his senses!

Is there a storm in your life this evening? Have you asked yourself why? God has a purpose behind it!

4. God had a purpose in the storm continuing (vs.11-16)
(Read v.11b and v.13b)

Why didn't the storm stop when Jonah was found out?

Surely Jonah had realized his fault?

But God had some more purposes to fulfill...

(i) God's plan was to teach Jonah an important lesson (vs. 12,15)

Jonah might have been sorry for running away from God, but I doubt very much if at this point he was ready to go to Nineveh.

Jonah still had something to learn. He had to learn the important principle that if God was really going to be able to use him, then Jonah had to die to himself – he had to put his own will to death completely, he had to learn that he was not his own – he belonged to God, for God to use as *He* would choose.

The storm was not going to cease until Jonah learned that lesson, so the storm wouldn't cease until Jonah was thrown overboard.

Until he was prepared to cast his life into the hands of an angry God, and let Him do with that life exactly what he pleased.

Verse 12 shows Jonah had learned the lesson, but it wasn't until v.15 when Jonah hit the waves that the storm calmed down.

Application: Is that storm still raging in your life this evening?

It will not die down until you get to the point that you're willing for God to do exactly what He wants with your life.

If you have glimpsed something of God's love and goodness, you'll be able to unreservedly give your life to Him to do whatever he wishes.

Go God's way – His way is always best!

That's what Jesus taught in Mark 8:34-37

Lose your life to God and He'll use it well!

According to 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 – 'You are not your own...'

Jim Elliott, the missionary to the Auca Indians of Ecuador said –

'He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.'

(ii) God's Plan was to bring the sailors to faith in the Living God
– *despite Jonah's disobedience!* (v.14, 16)

Not only did God have a lesson to teach Jonah, but he also allowed the storm to continue because He was going to use it to bring those heathen sailors to Himself.

Jonah would never have dreamt of witnessing to them himself – he was too bigoted – he thought God's salvation was only for Israel – The Jews – that's why he wouldn't go to Nineveh – The Assyrians. These were heathen sailors – Jonah thought that God wouldn't want to save them – but He did!

And He used ***Jonah's disobedient Mediterranean Cruise*** to do it!
God saved these men, not because of Jonah's testimony – but in spite of it!

God used the storm to break these hardened sailors.

Look at v.5 – *'they were afraid.'*

Look at v.10 – *'they were terrified.'*

But that was only natural fear.

Look at v.16 – *'At this the men greatly feared the Lord!'*

Their natural fear, and what they had experienced of God's dealings with Jonah, brought them to fear the Lord with reverent fear!

Maybe you're not saved, but there's a storm in your life this evening. Is God trying to speak to you? To get your attention? To save you?

In v.12 Jonah told them God's solution – to throw him overboard. But...

In v.13 The Sailors tried their own solution – to row to shore themselves.

- But as they tried to do so, the storm only grew worse!

The only way for us to be saved *is God's way*, not by our own strength, otherwise our storm will only get worse! It's through Christ alone (Jn 14:6).

So in v.14 they plead with God for mercy: the only way for a sinner to come.

Conclusion:

What is God saying through your storm tonight?

- Saved?
- Unsaved?

Jonah was disobedient, but in God's permissive will, and in his sovereignty, he still used his disobedience to reach heathen sailors.

'God can use a crooked stick to draw a straight line.'

But the fact that blessing resulted from Jonah's disobedience does not mean Jonah was right to disobey God – he wasn't!

The end does not justify the means.

Disobedience is sin – sin can never be justified!

It's just that God is merciful, and God is sovereign.

'His ways are past finding out.' (Isaiah 55:8-9)

In His wisdom He can cause all things to work together for good.

But that must never be an excuse for our disobedience.

In fact Jonah had to pay the consequences for his sin of disobedience.

Which was not too pleasant – as we'll see next week.

Obedience to God's Will is always the best way.

Our closing hymn says:

*'Trust and obey, for there's no other way,
to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey.'*

Have you laid your whole life on the altar for God to use? (v.4)

*'But we never can prove the delights of his love,
Until all on the altar we lay...'*

Can you really sing v.5?

'What he says we will do, where he sends we will go?'

Are you allowing God to do exactly what He wants with your life?