

Armagh Baptist Church
Sunday 22nd August 2010 – 6:30pm
'A Final Lesson for Jonah'
Jonah 3:10-4:11

Introduction

Tonight we come to the end of the Book of Jonah. Just 4 chapters long, but there is so much packed into these few pages of Scripture.

In Chapter 1 we saw God's Purposes for Jonah – in the storm
In Chapter 2 we saw God's Preparation of Jonah – in the fish
In Chapter 3 we saw the Repentance of Jonah – and the people, and God!
In Chapter 4 we will see 'One more lesson for Jonah – an angry prophet!'

Before we start to go through the Book of Jonah in more detail like we have done over the last 4 Sunday nights, all we know of Jonah beforehand is probably what we've learned from children's stories in Sunday School.

We always think of Jonah as a funny wee man who got swallowed by a fish! When you come into chapter 4 you can begin to understand why Jonah is commonly seen as a children's story, because in this chapter Jonah acts like a big child, or as we would say, 'A Big Wain!' Because in chapter 4 Jonah goes off in a huff, like a spoiled child!

That is surprising, since it follows so closely after ch.3:10 where we read that God had just spared the great city of Nineveh from destruction!

Jonah had preached the message God had given him, the people had repented straight away, and God spared Nineveh and did not destroy them. You would think Jonah would have been pleased and should have been rejoicing about this mass revival, but instead in ch.4:1 we read:

'But Jonah was greatly displeased' and what's more 'Jonah became angry!'

What on earth was Jonah angry about?
Why wasn't he rejoicing and praising God?
What was wrong with this strange wee prophet now?

This is the first thing I want us to discover tonight:

1. Why was Jonah angry? (vs.1-3)

What reason did Jonah have to be angry?

God had been so gracious to this man:

- He had spared his life in the storm at sea

- He had spared his life when he hit the waves
- He had rescued him from the belly of the great fish
- And then He had given him a second chance
- And even given him back his job – to go to Nineveh as a prophet!

How could a man who had been through all that, still have the gall to be angry – angry with God!?

Why was Jonah angry? – Let me suggest two reasons to you:

(i) The Ninevites were really his sworn enemies!

Maybe some of us wouldn't like to admit it, maybe we're not even aware of it, but I think there is probably a wee bit of patriotic blood in all of us, and we don't like those who attack or endanger our country or our national interests.

Perhaps deep down Jonah had never really dealt with his own patriotism or bigotry against Assyria and against the people of Nineveh!

God had given him a message of judgment to preach against them (ch.3:4) Perhaps it was just the very message that Jonah wanted to preach against Nineveh?!

But now God had gone and spared Nineveh, and Jonah was now angry!

He had just been sitting back happily waiting for a bolt from the blue to come and destroy Nineveh, but it hadn't come!

Application: Before we piously criticize Jonah, think about it like this:

Remember I told you that Nineveh is just inside the border of modern day Iraq? It was an evil and wicked country then, and we have seen in recent years that the Iraqi regime still had a reputation for being evil and wicked! America's last combat soldiers only left Iraq this week after 7 years there!

Do you remember how Saddam Hussein held British women and children hostage, using them as human shields, during the First Gulf War, at the time of the invasion of Kuwait? Well an SIM missionary couple, Bill & Anne Barnett (who had served in Muslim countries for many years), watched their TV screens back in Britain in horror during that crisis, as they saw their own young sons being paraded for the cameras, as Saddam Hussein patted one of them on their head. Their flight home for Christmas from boarding school in Pakistan to England had been hi-jacked and diverted to Baghdad, and all its passengers had been taken off and taken hostage by Saddam Hussein!

Supposing he had carried out some atrocities on those passengers, how would those parents have felt? Would they have been crying out to God to save Saddam Hussein, or would they have been crying out to God to punish and destroy him?

Now we know that Saddam Hussein has since been toppled and executed, but just supposing God had sent a true Spiritual Revival to Iraq and Saddam Hussein himself had been converted, and God had poured out his blessing – and not his judgment – on that country – how would we have felt then? Would we have rejoiced? Or would we have been angry?

Or bring it home to our own situation here in Ireland:
After 40 years of *'the Troubles'* when this City and District, and South Armagh in particular, experienced more than their fair share of atrocities at the hands of paramilitaries. If many of the perpetrators of that violence had now got saved, and experienced the blessing of God's salvation, instead of God's judgment, how would you feel? Would you rejoice? Or would you be angry?

Jonah was angry! Maybe some of us would be too!
Perhaps Jonah was angry, because God had not destroyed his enemies, like he had said he was going to do. Or...

(ii) Was it because, God had not vindicated Jonah's Prophecy?

Perhaps Jonah felt that he had not been vindicated as a prophet, because his prophecy that he had preached in Nineveh had not come true!

He had preached the message God had given him to preach, which was:
'Forty more days and Nineveh will be overturned!'
But those 40 days had passed, and Nineveh was still standing, because its people had repented. Perhaps this was why Jonah was angry?

Someone could have come up to Jonah and said,
'Huh, you're not much of a prophet – what you said would happen, didn't happen – so you must be a false prophet!'
After all, the evidence that a prophet had been sent from God, was that his prophecy came true – Jonah's didn't! He felt his reputation was at stake!
In fact he was more concerned about his own reputation than he was about God's honour and God's glory.

When 120,000 pagan Ninevites turned to God, they brought glory to God, but Jonah would rather see his own reputation enhanced, than see God get the glory!

He would rather see 120,000 Ninevites destroyed and perish, just so long as his reputation remained intact! How selfish can you get?
In fact he was so afraid of losing face that in v.3 he asks God to take his life! He'd rather be dead, than have his reputation as a prophet dragged through the mud! How selfish!

Application: What about us? Are we not like that sometimes?
Why do we want to see people saved in this church?
Why do we want God to bless the Gospel outreach of Armagh Baptist Church? Is it really for God's glory, and the eternal welfare of those who do get saved, or is it just so the preacher can pat himself on the back, and think he must be doing OK, he mustn't be too bad a preacher after all?!

Or is it just so that the reputation of this church will get a boost, so we can have 'one-up' on the other churches in this City?

Are we praying that people will get saved in this church, so that God will be glorified, or so that our reputation as a church will be enhanced, and we can feel good about ourselves?

I don't believe blessing will come until we are really concerned that God will be glorified, and not us at all.

The fact is, instead of being angry, Jonah should have been very grateful and very humbled, that God had used him at all!
God could have spared Nineveh without Jonah's help, but God had chosen to use him, and to bless him greatly in the process. But because of his sulking, Jonah had missed the joy of that blessing!

God can save people without any human instrument being involved at all:
I remember meeting a girl called **Genevieve Gros** while I was on a BYE Team in Cork many years ago. She had just come across on holiday from Brittany in France. I think she was a nurse from memory, there were no evangelical churches near to where she lived in France, but as we talked, it was clear that God had done a work in her life, without any preacher, evangelist or church ever being involved. He had saved her by his grace.

Or think of **Jamie Brennan** who has been coming to this church for the past year from Co Monaghan. He was given a Gideon's New Testament in First Year in Keady High School, and he had started to read it for himself. About 2 years ago he had come to trust in Christ as his Saviour, just through reading that New Testament. And about a year ago he realized he needed to be involved in an Evangelical Church. He found out about us from our church website, e-mailed me to find out more about us, and then

started coming along since. God saved Jamie, without any human instrument being involved, except for a Gideon faithfully passing out copies of the NT in his school a few years earlier! God can do it alone!

So God could have saved Nineveh without Jonah's help. But when God chooses to work *through us* to reach and save someone, we should rejoice and be very humbled indeed. God can use us, even though we are sinful, far from perfect, and full of faults! He doesn't have to use us, but he does. We are privileged to be *'labourers together with God!'* (2 Cor 6:1).

Jonah was angry, but God was going to teach him one more very important lesson. Notice, first of all...

2. How God taught Jonah that lesson (vs.4-8)

Think of Jonah for a moment. Sulking like a child. In a huff, wanting to die. What would you have done with him? I'm sure many of us would just have left him to sulk, and walked away. But God didn't! God spared this man so many times! And now when he's shaking his fist at God, and stamping his feet in a rage, God doesn't drop him, God doesn't leave him to mope.

(i) God shows his patience with Jonah once again.

- He doesn't even tell him off.
- He doesn't tell him to catch himself on.
- He simply asks Jonah a gentle question...
'Jonah, is it right for you to be angry?'
'Have you any right to be angry?'

Proverbs 15:1 says, *'A soft answer turns away wrath,
but a harsh word stirs up anger.'*

God answered Jonah gently, taking the heat out of his anger. But are you not amazed that God is so patient with Jonah? But it's great to know that God is just as patient with us.

At times we bear secret grudges against God.

- Why did God do this or that in my life?
- Why did he take away my loved one?
- Why did he let my friend get so sick?
- Why did he not get me that job?
- Why do I have to scrimp and scrape to make ends meet?
...and so we stand silently shaking our fist at God!

But God is as patient with us at those times, as he is here with angry Jonah. See Psalm 103:10-14 – *'God doesn't deal with us according to our sins.'*

- He deals with us a father deals with the child that he loves.
- He remembers that we are creatures of the dust – sinners at best!
- And so he deals with us gently.

So God deals patiently and gently with Jonah.

He just gives him a question to think about:

'Have you any right to be angry?'

Meanwhile, as Jonah mulls that one over, he goes out of the City, makes a little shelter on the east side of the City, and sits down to wait for the City to be destroyed – as he had hoped! (It was just outside the gate in this photo).

Jonah might have learned a lot of lessons in the belly of the fish, but we see here that he's far from perfect yet. He's got an awful lot still to learn. And in v.6 God begins to teach him, and what does he do? Even though Jonah has been acting like a spoiled child...

(ii) God decides to bless him yet again.

Jonah had made his own shelter, but God gives him something better. God caused 'a plant / a gourd / a vine' to grow up over Jonah's head to protect him from the scorching heat of the sun.

God didn't have to do it, he was under no obligation.

Jonah didn't deserve it – far from it!

But God, in His grace, out of his undeserved favour, gave him some shelter from the sun.

And what do we read next?

'And Jonah was very happy about the vine' (v.6b).

Jonah's anger had turned to happiness.

Lit. *'He rejoiced with great joy!'*

He was 'over the moon' about the plant God had given him for a sun-shade! I'm sure he even saw it as a sign that God was still blessing him!

But remember, God wasn't out to reward Jonah with comfort and kindness.

God was in the process of teaching Jonah a very important lesson.

So the next day just as he had sent the plant to shade Jonah, God sent a worm to nibble at the plant, to wither the plant away!

(iii) God had given, and God had taken away.

Now what was Jonah going to do?

Well, next day the sun came up. It got hotter and hotter.

The rays were just hitting the crown of Jonah's head!

Maybe it was beginning to burn his bald patch!

But then to make matters worse, God sent a strong east wind that kicked up the sand, and it beat against Jonah like pins and needles, and the sun beat down on Jonah's head, until he began to feel faint.

And then he resorts to the same old story...

*'Lord, take away my life. I don't want to live anymore. I want to die!
'It would be better for me to die, than to live!'* (v.8)

And then God says the same thing to Jonah again in v.9:

'Jonah, have you any right to be angry?'

But notice this time God puts his finger on what Jonah was angry about.

God said, *'Do you have any right to be angry **about the vine?**'* (v.9a)

Jonah had so quickly got taken up with his own comforts that he had forgotten all about the Ninevites!

Jonah had lost sight of the needs of over 120,000 people.

All he was concerned about now was the needs of just one person—himself!

He was just so angry that his home-comforts had been taken away!

And he defiantly snaps back at God:

'I do,' he said, 'I am angry enough to die!' (v.9b)

He really is like a spoiled child now, isn't he?

Application: But what about you and me?

Perhaps God has blessed you with something – perhaps a comfortable home – a secure job – a good income – many of this world's comforts.

Then suddenly those things are taken away!

Did you get angry at God?

And stamp your feet at him and say, 'You had no right to take that away!'

Hold on a wee minute...

God has every right. None of us deserves the least of God's blessings in the first place! Anything we own or have, we have out of God's free grace and generosity.

Everything we have in this life has been given to us *on trust* by God to look after, to steward. We will give an account to Him one day of what we have done with it. James 1:17 says:

'Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.'

Everything we have was given to us by God, so we have no right to get indignant whenever it is taken away.

But you say, 'I worked hard to pay for it!' – and maybe so...

But don't forget you couldn't earn a penny unless God gave you life and health and strength to do so in the first place (See Deuteronomy 8:10-18).

God can prosper us, or he can take our wealth and comforts away. Whether we have much or little, our delight should be in the one who has given us what we do have, NOT in the gifts he has given us. Our delight should be in the Giver, not the gifts.

Jonah had got his eyes off God and onto the gift God had given him – the plant! But now God had taken that prop away, and now he had Jonah just where he wanted him – just in the right condition to learn this last and very important lesson.

And let us not miss this lesson this evening either...

3. What was that Lesson? (vs.9-11)

We see this lesson in vs.10-11

But the Lord said, *'You have been concerned about this vine,
Though you did not tend it or make it grow.
It sprang up overnight and died overnight.*

*But Nineveh has **more than 120,000 people** who cannot tell
their right hand from their left, and many cattle as well.
Should I not be concerned about that great city?'*

Here's the lesson: If Jonah could be so taken up and concerned about an old plant, that he had not planted, that he had not tended, that he had not caused to grow, that disappeared overnight, why shouldn't God be concerned about the great City of Nineveh that had at least 120,000 **people** – human beings living in it. People whom God had made, to whom he had given life, and people who had been spared from destruction so that they might repent of their sin and come to know him and fellowship with him?

The two things just didn't compare! And yet Jonah couldn't have cared less about the 120,000 people in Nineveh, and yet he was so angry over a stupid old plant being taken away.

What sort of a man was Jonah to think like that?

And yet, what sort of people are we?

We put so much effort into building and decorating and furnishing beautiful homes for ourselves, getting ourselves the best of clothes, making sure our children get the best of education, no matter what else goes by the wayside.

We even put lots of effort into putting up a fine church building to meet in each week for worship – we get it all just right.

We spend a lot of time putting together new and interesting and varied programmes for all the various meetings in the life of our church – and all the while God is saying, *'What about the people?'* ***'What about people?'***

What about the **15,000 people** in Armagh City?
Or the **55,000 people** in the Armagh City & District Council area?
What about the many people in this city who never darken a church door?
Perhaps the very rich or the very poor, who think the church is not for them!

What about the teenagers in this City who get caught up in drugs and drinking sprees night by night?

What about the drunkards? The down and outs?
The lonely, the elderly, the unemployed?
What about the people of Armagh City?

What about the ordinary people of this City who need to know God?
Who need to be saved? God is saying to us tonight:
'Shouldn't I be concerned about them?' And God is saying to us tonight,
'I want you to be concerned about them too!'

It's time we stopped worrying about 'plants' and 'possessions' and 'programmes' – it's time we started being concerned about 'People!'

The Final lesson from the Book of Jonah is simply that:
God cares about People – God has Compassion for People.
And God wants us to care about People too, and to go to them, even if they won't come to us. Maybe they don't deserve it; but then maybe we didn't deserve in the first place either!

Conclusion:

And so Jonah drifts off the pages of Scripture.
I wonder did he learn his lesson?
I think he did – he wrote the book, didn't he?

He didn't paint himself in a very good light either, did he?
And what's more, he gave God the last word.
And that's the word we are left with: ***'God cares about lost people!'***

Do we? - Are we known as a church that cares about people?
Do you, do I, really care about the lost men and women all around us?
Let's learn the lesson from the story of Jonah, and let's reach out to the lost!
Let's care more about people, than possessions, programmes or our own home comforts, and let's get out there and reach people for Christ! Amen.