

## Jonah

Hi,

Hope this Sunday Thought finds you well.

In the words of Honorary Colonel, Captain Sir Tom Moore, who died this week in Bedford hospital '**Tomorrow Will Be a Better Day**'.

Sir Tom, if you remember, raised over 39,000,000 pounds for the NHS, just before his 100<sup>th</sup> birthday, in just over 4 weeks, because of a throw away bet from his son-in-law. His son-in-law said, 'I bet you can't walk 100 lengths of the garden before your 100<sup>th</sup> birthday'. The rest as they say is history. Thank you, Sir Tom, for being such an inspiration to so many.

Let us pray.

Father God, thank you for Sir Tom Moore, he is an inspiration to us all, not to give up, no matter how old we are. Thank you for his humility, his personality, but above all his determination to serve throughout his life. Father God you are the giver and taker of life, help us to be an inspiration to all those around us in the time we have left. Help us to look to You, see where you are working and join You. Thank you for all that you give to us, protect us Lord we pray, In Jesus Name, Amen.

We have just started a new series **Heroes of the Bible**. And if you read last week's Sunday Thought on Rahab, written by Tom, thank you Tom, I hope you got as much out of it as I did. As I was thinking and praying through what to bring this morning, I was drawn to the Old Testament and my old pal Jonah.

Many of us know the story of Jonah. It has been a favourite Sunday School story for many a year! When we look at Jonah as a name, in the company of Nahum, Obadiah and Habakkuk, his name sticks out far above the rest!

In my days at school, if your name was Jonah then you were treated like you had bad luck or were a jinx. Totally different today, as the name Jonah seems to be popular again, as is the other Minor Prophets names. Obadiah being one of them. Our grandson bearing that as a second name. Jonah is well known to Christians and non-Christians alike! Famous for running away and spending time in the belly of a great fish! Jonah is my nemesis. Whenever God wants to

get my attention, He uses Jonah to do it. So, now, I'm just wondering what is around the corner??

Jonah is known as a minor prophet, and the book of Jonah is not about his work, but more about his rebellion toward God! His mission was to do what God asked him of him! God gave Jonah a specific task, 'Go to Nineveh and preach the Gospel!

Chapter 1 is about him running away. The interesting thing is, Jonah knows God, he knows exactly who God is, what He has done, and what He can do. He knows how powerful God is, he knows how loving, caring and Gracious God is. And yet, he still thinks he can outrun God and disappear to Tarshish. Writer **Dennis Lyle**, in his book '**You can Run but You can't Hide**, the life of Jonah, says; 'The great preacher Charles Haddon Spurgeon recalls a boy who was at school with him, the boy would often lose his temper and would always throw something to vent his frustration'. What amazed Spurgeon was not the fact that the lad would lose his temper on a regular basis, but there was always something close to hand for him to throw, convenient.

In the same way, Jonah conveniently found a boat in Joppa. Do not take this as divine provision, Jonah was looking for a way to escape. That got me thinking. I wonder if we do the same in other ways. In the modern world that we live in, with all the technology we have, do we bury our heads or run away from what God is asking us to do?

Could it be that the way technology is, emails, FB, Instagram, text messages, could this technology have contributed to the rise in cyber bullying, as it is extremely easy to hide behind a screen. Suicide among young people especially is on the increase. Has our modern way of communicating, contributed to the breakdown of conversation between family members, no need to talk we can hide behind a screen. Trolling, the modern name for stalking someone on online, and then saying very nasty things about them for the rest of the world to see. The point is, as Dennis Lyle writes, **Satan will always provide transport for someone who is running away from God.**

Jonah did not like the Ninevites. In fact, not a lot of people did like them in those times, as Nineveh was a nation that was guilty of many terrible things against the Lord! Such things as evil plots, cruelty against the helpless, idolatry, prostitution and witchcraft, to name but a few. Bit like today really. Nineveh itself, was situated about 500 miles northeast of Israel, and Jonah was not going.

So, he took off in the opposite direction trying everything he could to outrun God! When God is on our case, He will not let us go, no matter what we try to do. Jonah paid the money boarded a ship and he went below to have a sleep. As he slept, all around him was panic, confusion and fear.

A storm raged, the ship was near to breaking point, the crew were trying desperately to save themselves, the cargo and the ship. To the point the captain had to wake up Jonah and say, '**HOW CAN YOU SLEEP!** How could Jonah sleep?

In many ways, this part of the story reminds me of Jesus, when He calmed the storm in Matthew 8:23-27.

Jesus was also asleep, the disciples were also afraid of what might happen to them as the waves came crashing down onto the boat.

And as Jesus says in Matthew 8:26....'**You of little faith, why are you so afraid?**' The conclusion I have come to, Jonah is a man of great faith, read on! God is at work from the very second Jonah looks in the opposite direction to Nineveh. God is not only working IN Jonah, but also IN the circumstances that surround him. That is the same with us today. God is working in our circumstances. As I mentioned at the beginning, Jonah knows God and what he is capable of. The crew are fearful. What have you done? Who are you? Call upon your God to save us! v12 Jonah says, '**pick me up and throw me into the sea, and the storm will stop**'. As I have just mentioned, Jonah was a man of great faith. The Grace of God falls on Jonah and the crew as they throw him overboard. Immediately after, the crew worship the creator God, and the storm subsides, they have come to know the favour of God.

Some of you may have read a book called **The Rooftop, a Crisis of Opportunity** by Dennis Pethers, it is a good read. Well, there is a parallel to these two books I have mentioned, **You can Run but You can't Hide**. They both say the same thing! Dennis Pethers is saying, 'we have a crisis in this country as a generation is growing up **NOT KNOWING, THAT THEY DON'T KNOW WHO JESUS IS**.

And Dennis Lyle says, the present-day Church is represented in this incident (that is, Jonah and the storm). 'This is no different to a lot of us Christians today! Jonah was asleep, he did not know what was going on around him, the ship was breaking up and souls were perishing, and HE WAS ASLEEP! So, why did Jonah tell the crew to throw him overboard? Did he have faith that God would save him?

Or was he trying to gain some brownie points with God by saving the crews lives? How did he know the storm would subside if they did throw him overboard? Because no matter what happened, Jonah had faith.

Jonah has been swallowed by a great fish and in the mist of his despair Jonah cries out to his God. In the beginning, God started talking to Jonah, **'The WORD of the Lord came to Jonah.'** Now God was talking to Jonah through **HIS WORKS.** The Wind, the Sea, the Storm, and the great fish! The prayer of Jonah can be read in Chapter 2. How many Christians have you heard say 'where is God in my trouble? And how many have you heard people say, 'I'm in trouble I need to call on God because I know He will answer my prayer? Jonah knows God and he knows that the God he worships is a God of GRACE. Chapter 2:10 is significant. It seems like one of those throw away lines that we see so often in the Bible, **'and the Lord commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land'** (Ch 2:10). It is a significant verse because God was not only preparing Jonah for the task in hand, but He was also preparing the Ninevites to hear the Gospel.

The Ninevites worshiped other gods, they were into signs and wonders. A full solar eclipse in 763 BC would have worried the people, followed by 3 consecutive years of flood and famine. This would have caused the people to question their gods, why is this happening? Why are our gods not helping? Religious unrest was rising. At least 4 years of confusion was setting in, people were asking questions, anxiety, concern and fear was building up.

**And a long comes Jonah** - with a story of a creator God that controls the weather and makes storms come and go. **Chapter 3** sees Jonah fulfil his mission. Covered in whale vomit, smelling like Billingsgate fish market on a bad day (or he may have had a wash in the sea), and a three day walk in the heat ahead of him. He preaches an 8-word sermon, 5 words in Hebrew, (I bet you wish that were true this morning...), and 120 thousand people come to know the Lord.

How did this happen.

Well, it happened because God designed it to happen. The whole BIG FISH thing was probably designed to teach Jonah a lesson, but in fact it was also designed to get the attention of Nineveh! The name Nineveh comes from one of their 'gods' they worshiped called **Nina aka Ishtar.** The symbol they used to depict this 'goddess' is a fish in an enclosure. Seeing and or hearing, that a man was vomited out of a great fish would get the attention of the people. The

interesting thing is that Nineveh only heard the gospel once, and a Nation repents. Israel heard the good news several times, and in their stubbornness refused to repent. That is why they were wandering for 40 years in the desert. Sometimes we can be stubborn to the very LOVE we crave. Nineveh heard and repented, Israel heard and wondered for 40 years.

We have an amazing God, a God full of Grace and patience not just with Jonah, but with all of us. In each chapter of the book of Jonah something GREAT is portrayed. Ch 1, a **GREAT STORM**, CH2, a **GREAT FISH**, Ch 3, a **GREAT REVIVAL**, Ch 4, a **GREAT GOD IN HEAVEN**. Also in Ch 4, we see Jonah is just fed up with God saying, **'is this not what I said you would do? That is why I was so quick to flee to Tarshish'**. God could have just clicked his fingers and sorted out Nineveh in a second! But he chose to use Jonah. Jonah knew God, he knows what God can do, and God did it. The Grace of God is personal and corporate; it is for everyone all the time. Jonah was not interested in the Ninevites in the beginning and he certainly was not interested in them after they repented. In fact, Jonah was only interested in dying because he was **so** angry with God for doing what He did.

So, what lessons can we learn from Jonah. Where do we stand?

Are you a Ninevite, that you have never heard the gospel before? If that is you today, then you are reading or hearing this for a reason, God is trying to get your attention!

Or are you just a grumpy old so 'n' so that is only interested in getting their own way, being in rebellion to God, and when He asks you to do something you go running in the opposite direction. Or maybe you are like Israel that you have heard the Gospel so many times before, that you just don't care anymore, and you want some excitement in your life. Or maybe you are in a good place with the Lord, then SMILE! Let people know that the GOOD NEWS **REALLY IS THE GOOD NEWS!** The Grace of God is for US, for those who know Him to help us get through life. That is important today than it ever has been before, but God is still in control. The Grace of God is for those that **DON'T KNOW HIM**; also, for those that **DON'T KNOW, THAT THEY DON'T KNOW HIM**. And He uses us to get that message across. Why does God use us, because when we work with Him, or not, in the case of Jonah; He gives us a testimony to share with others, to show the Love of God and His Grace, that changes people's lives!

If we engage with God with an open cheerful heart He will work In US and Through US. If we engage with God in a disobedient way, He will work in us and through us, but we will be covered in whale vomit and life will be hard, and when we repent, we will still have to do the job God asked us to do! Where are you at with the Lord in your personal walk?

Where are WE at, with the Lord as in the Church, individual and national? If you are feeling life is over for you, let me tell you it is not over till the Lord calls you home! He has not finished with you yet!

If for any reason you believe God has been talking to you today and you would like a chat then please look on the Sandy Baptist Church website and get in touch, I would be pleased to help in any way I can.

Brothers and Sisters, let us not be part of allowing a generation to grow up **NOT KNOWING, THAT THEY DON'T KNOW WHO JESUS IS.**

1. Let us not fall asleep while the storm rages around us and souls perish. But let us take the Great Commission in both hands and march into the community and with this I finish.

**All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you, and surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.**

Let us Pray.

Father God, thank you for your word to us today. Work in the hearts of the people who hear or read this message.

Thank you for the journey we are all on with you, bring fruit we pray. Lord Jesus, help those of us that are struggling to grasp once again that you really do Love us, no matter what we have done.

We think of all the people that have died across the world due to Covid-19 and the families that have been broken apart because of it, but we thank you for the inspiration of Sir Captain Tom Moore. Please Lord give us the faith as Jonah had, to run to you at this time and not away from you. We pray that you pour out your blessing on us today as we Go, **Tomorrow Will Be A Good Day**, in Jesus name we pray. AMEN