

# Keynotes from Pastor Tim's am Sermon on 9/05/2021

## Series – Jonah, the runaway servant

### Part 2 – “When the world meets the church”

#### Text: Jonah 1 verses 1-16

All scripture references are from the ESV.

**Jonah 1:1-16** Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, <sup>2</sup>“Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it, for their evil has come up before me.” <sup>3</sup>But Jonah rose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD. He went down to Joppa and found a ship going to Tarshish. So he paid the fare and went down into it, to go with them to Tarshish, away from the presence of the LORD.<sup>4</sup> But the LORD hurled a great wind upon the sea, and there was a mighty tempest on the sea, so that the ship threatened to break up. <sup>5</sup>Then the mariners were afraid, and each cried out to his god. And they hurled the cargo that was in the ship into the sea to lighten it for them. But Jonah had gone down into the inner part of the ship and had lain down and was fast asleep. <sup>6</sup>So the captain came and said to him, “What do you mean, you sleeper? Arise, call out to your god! Perhaps the god will give a thought to us, that we may not perish.”<sup>7</sup> And they said to one another, “Come, let us cast lots, that we may know on whose account this evil has come upon us.” So they cast lots, and the lot fell on Jonah. <sup>8</sup>Then they said to him, “Tell us on whose account this evil has come upon us. What is your occupation? And where do you come from? What is your country? And of what people are you?” <sup>9</sup>And he said to them, “I am a Hebrew, and I fear the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land.” <sup>10</sup>Then the men were exceedingly afraid and said to him, “What is this that you have done!” For the men knew that he was fleeing from the presence of the LORD, because he had told them.<sup>11</sup> Then they said to him, “What shall we do to you, that the sea may quiet down for us?” For the sea grew more and more tempestuous. <sup>12</sup>He said to them, “Pick me up and hurl me into the sea; then the sea will quiet down for you, for I know it is because of me that this great tempest has come upon you.” <sup>13</sup>Nevertheless, the men rowed hard to get back to dry land, but they could not, for the sea grew more and more tempestuous against them. <sup>14</sup>Therefore they called out to the LORD, “O LORD, let us not perish for this man's life, and lay not on us innocent blood, for you, O LORD, have done as it pleased you.” <sup>15</sup>So they picked up Jonah and hurled him into the sea, and the sea ceased from its raging. <sup>16</sup>Then the men feared the LORD exceedingly, and they offered a sacrifice to the LORD and made vows.

Over the centuries, the church has spoken of, and tried to define, the biblical truth of the providence of God. The best definition is perhaps to be found in the Westminster Confession of Faith (see p4). This tells us that God is governing every aspect of world history according to his own will and purpose, that it might all be to the praise of the glory of his wisdom, power, justice, goodness and mercy. The Bible is given to us so that we might rightly know ourselves and how God deals with us. It shows us who God is, so that we can love and trust him, and how he works in the world and in our lives to bring us to know him, delight in him and worship him.

The story of Jonah is an example of this. Looking at the interaction between the pagan sailors and Jonah, we can see what happens **when the world meets the church**, and how the church is challenged about this in three ways.

If you are not yet a believer in Christ, and have had a bad experience with Christians then this narrative will help you see that even if the church has let you down, perhaps through being uncaring or critical,

**God is still lovingly at work through the church's failure to bring you into a relationship with himself.**

The book of Jonah shows us all that, even if we have failed in our duty of care for the souls of people in the world, **God is still lovingly at work through our failure to bring us (the church) to a place of usefulness.**

This is a message of hope for us all, despite the challenges. God, the creator of all things, is directing and governing all creatures and actions (even the roll of a dice) in order to bring people to know him and praise him for his grace.

### **1. The church's rebuke (v6)**

As Christians, we are very good at rebuking our culture for failure to obey God's commandments, for the way people dress or what they do with their time. We criticise people for their sexual ethics, use of drugs, tattoos, music and how they raise their children. We find plenty to rebuke them for but **do we pray for them?**

The world may be blameworthy in many respects but one day those people will be accountable to God for their lives.

**Do we have a heart of compassion for them because they are currently eternally lost and don't know the God of grace who we claim to know?**

If not, then we are no different to Jonah and deserve the rebuke that the world gives. Jonah, as God's man on the ground, has a message of grace for a pagan people in Nineveh, but chose to disobey God and go in the opposite direction. Because of Jonah's disobedience, God hurled a great wind on the sea, and in the tempest, the ship was likely to break up so that everyone would drown. The pagan sailors' response (v5 above) stands in direct contrast to how Jonah responds. The terrified sailors are praying to their gods and throwing their cargo overboard.

**Here are godless men who are concerned for human life and doing everything they can to save life.**

What would you expect of Jonah in this? After all, he knows:

- The God who created and controls everything, including the sea
- Every human being is an image bearer of this God and is therefore of infinite value
- If these sailors die without knowing God, they will be eternally lost
- God has made provision for sinful humanity to have their sin atoned for

Yet instead of leading the prayers, helping to lighten the ship and telling the sailors about God's mercy, **he is asleep!** When we attempt to run from God, guilt and anxiety drains us so that we are emotionally and spiritually exhausted, as Jonah was. Wrapped up in himself, he didn't care that he was the cause of this trouble for the pagan sailors and that these image bearers of God might lose their lives and might perish without knowing God.

The world encounters God's man (Jonah) and what they see is someone uncaring. The captain rebukes him.

It is a sad day when the world has to rebuke the church:

- for its lack of concern, because our private faith is of no public good
- because we are emotionally and spiritually asleep to the eternal needs of people who are living around us

- because we are so wrapped up in our own needs that we fail to let our faith show to those who are perishing
- because we are so dead to spiritual realities that we don't pray to the God we know to save those people

The world is living how it is because people do not know God, but the reason they do not know him is because we are not telling them. **Perhaps the church needs to stop rebuking the world for how they live, but to take on board the rebuke that we are not praying for their salvation, sharing our faith or showing God's mercy.**

## 2. The church's identity (v7)

The sailors want to know who is responsible for this crisis so they cast lots. The lot falls on Jonah, but this is no coincidence. God is governing the result (**Proverbs 16:33** see p4), as he also governs the storm and everything else that is happening. In desperation, the sailors question Jonah (**v8**) about what makes up his identity. His answer (**v9**) reveals what his priority is – his ethnicity, not his God.

This is a challenge to us in our own conversations. When we first meet people, there are always questions being asked about who we are. We may talk about our job, family or where we live. How different our conversations would be if we used Jonah's second response (**v9**) as our answer. We all get our identity from something, but as the church, we need to gain our identity from Christ and who we are in him. If we really grasp who we are in Christ, our conversations both with those outside and those inside the church would be transformed. Ahead of any other fact about ourselves, and however costly or embarrassing it might be, we must state as our true identity:

**I am a Christian who loves Jesus Christ and I serve and worship him.**

## 3. The church's sacrifice (vv11-15)

Instead of turning on him as the source of their trouble, the sailors ask Jonah what needs to be done. Although he tells them to throw him overboard, they try to save him by rowing to land. Jonah hadn't cared that he had put the lives of these men in danger, but they cared enough about him to do all they can to save his life.

This is an example of God's common grace. God restrains the evil in the world so that it isn't as bad as it could be. When we see the good works that the world does, we need to be thankful to God for his grace and image at work in those who don't know him and be willing to learn from them.

The sailors finally realise they have no option but to throw Jonah overboard. (Neither they nor Jonah know what happens in v17 – find out next week!) They and Jonah expect that he will die in the sea.

In a remarkable expression of pity, Jonah is offering to die in the place of these sailors, giving us an important lesson.

### **All life-changing love is substitutionary**

It might just be that we have to die so that people around us will be saved. The history of missions shows us men and women who loved lost sinners enough to lay down their lives to tell them that the God whom they have offended loves them and has made a way for them to be saved. God may call us to die in a different way.

- We may need to die to our obsession with me-time which shows itself in the time we spend watching TV and on social media. Instead spend that time praying for our family and neighbours who don't yet know Jesus and for the unreached peoples of the world.

When Jonah slept, the captain rebuked him by saying '**Pray to your God for us**'. He called him to join the prayer meeting that was happening on deck, rather than sleeping his life away. Though they might not acknowledge it, the world is crying out for us as believers to pray to our God for their salvation. Join with us in praying for this.

- We may need to die to our reputation. Is saving ourselves from embarrassment worth more to us than the eternal souls of our family, friends and neighbours?

### **All life-changing love is substitutionary**

God gets mission accomplished through sacrificial love because that best models what the gospel is. The storm of God's anger against our sin was turned away through the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross 2000 years ago, so that we can live

eternally knowing his mercy, grace and love. This message needs to actually be spoken out to the world around us – acts of kindness are not enough on their own. The way God has chosen for this to be done is through our own sacrifice of love.

- Jonah refused to go and tell pagans about God’s mercy but God providentially worked through his disobedience so that he spoke to pagans, telling them about God and laying down his life to save them.
- These men, who didn’t know God, then prayed to him, feared him and worshipped him through sacrifice, committing themselves to him through vows (v16).

God’s purpose is that all people groups on earth will join together around the throne of God to lift up a chorus of praise to God for his grace. He providentially works in everything to ensure that happens. That offers hope.

- When we feel such failures because of our reluctance to evangelise, God can still work through us to accomplish his purposes. Confess, repent and receive forgiveness – and start praying!
- For those of us with unbelieving family – the God who pursued the pagan sailors, bringing them into contact with a rebellious Jonah, is able to save those we love. Pray that God will bring other believers into their lives
- For those of you on the run from God or who haven’t heard of him. If you are reading this, know that the God who pursued pagan sailors is pursuing you and giving you the opportunity to come to know him.

**Westminster Confession of Faith 1646** (regarding the providence of God)

God the creator of all things doth uphold, direct, dispose, and govern all creatures, actions and things, from the greatest to the least, by his most wise and holy providence, according to his infallible foreknowledge, and the free and immutable counsel of his own will to the praise of the glory of his wisdom, power, justice and mercy.

**Proverbs 16:33** The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD.