



Looking Inwards (15 mins)
Caring For Each Other

*Reflecting on your life at the moment, is there anything you would like to share with other members of your home group which you feel is appropriate (this is an **opportunity to share**, not something you have to do, however: 'It's the sharing that enables the caring!')* for:

- Thanksgiving?
- Prayer?
- Encouragement?
- Support in any way?



Looking Outwards (15 mins)
Concern For Others

*Is there anything concerning someone in your: family; circle of friends; neighbours; or church, which you would like to share (please be careful not to pass on anything that is **confidential** or which you think the person/people concerned would not wish to be shared) for:*

- Thanksgiving?
- Prayer?
- Encouragement?
- Support in any way?

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The Story Of Jonah (1/4)
HG87: Jonah Runs Away From God

Jonah 1:1-17

Home Group Study Notes

26th January 2014 - Revd Paul A. Carr



PLEASE COMPLETE AS MUCH AS YOU CAN
ON THIS WORKSHEET IN PREPARATION
BEFORE THE MEETING!

Don't forget to take your Bible to Home Group with you, along with any previous notes and other resources which might be helpful.



Welcome (10 mins)
Ice Breaker

Jonah bought a ticket for a 'one way cruise' to Tarshish! What, or where, would be your ideal holiday destination?



Looking Upwards (10 mins)
Worship

In your time of worship, you may want to sing Songs of Praise; listen to a Worship CD, as well as using Meditations; Bible Readings; Prayers ...



Looking Upwards (40 mins) Bible Study

Read the text for this study, and any references given, then answer the following questions. You may find it helpful to listen to the sermon and/or read through the sermon notes as you do so. Discuss some, or all, your answers with your Home Group and, remember, these questions are only a guide to start your discussions.

1: Think back to when you were a child. Can you remember how disobedience was sometimes more costly than obedience? Think of an example that you can share with your group.

2: Jonah was trying to run away from God because he didn't want to go to Nineveh and proclaim God's word, vs1-4. Have you ever wanted to run away from something you knew God wanted you to do? Where might Nineveh be for you in your life? Where might Tarshish be in your life?

3: How do you think Jonah felt when the captain urged him to call on God for help, vs6? Have you ever experienced losing the desire to pray in your Christian life? How did it make you feel? What turned things around for you?

If we believe that God is the creator of heaven and earth, then nothing is outside of his power. I was reminded of this famous line from William Cowper, when I met with Barbara and her family last Sunday: *God moves in a mysterious way His wonders to perform; He plants His footsteps in the sea, and rides upon the storm ...*

However, unlike Geppetto who, you may remember, was swallowed by a whale named Monstro, there is no rescuer like Pinocchio, going down into the ocean to rescue Jonah. It's just as well this great fish wasn't called Moby Dick otherwise Jonah wouldn't have lived to tell the tale about the one that got away! I wonder, how many of you here have, or have had, a goldfish named Jonah? We did!

I've no doubt that God could easily have provided a piece of floating wreckage/cargo for Jonah to cling too, till he washed up, half-drowned, on some beach. But Jesus said that miracles were 'signs and wonders to those who don't believe' and this must surely be the case here - all the more so when we remember that Jesus was prepared to use Jonah's experience as a picture of his resurrection (Matthew 12:31-40).

Conclusion

The Christian life is often compared to a pilgrimage, a journey where we are constantly encountering *forks in the road*, junctions and crossroads. Which way shall we go when we meet them? Have you ever noticed that we often have two choices in our lives when God wants to work in and through us? A wide road and a narrow road; a right or wrong choice. Whilst our choice may not necessarily bring destruction and chastisement, it can certainly thwart our ability to be more effective for God.

The poem 'Road Not Taken' by Robert Frost has the famous line: *Two roads diverged in a yellow wood, And sorry I could not travel both - I took the one less travelled by, And that has made all the difference.* Sometimes, it's not a case of a fork in the road but this! We wish we had one signpost, but we have this! All we want is a straight road! One of life's hardest lessons is that we have to live with the consequences of our decisions - and that's why one of the most important skills we can ever develop is the ability to make wise choices.

Jonah's rejection of God's commission was as emphatic as it could be. It affected his attitude, his physical whereabouts, and his compassion for those in the world around him. He thought everything was going according to plan when in fact it was going hopelessly wrong. He lost the essentials of his relationship with God, his reliance on God's word and forgot the importance of his prayer life. In short, he was backsliding. Proverbs 14:14 (KJV): *The backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways ...* and that is certainly true of Jonah and, whilst he may have been content with the way things were, God certainly wasn't.

And so, through a miracle of God's divine intervention, Jonah could say, as the psalmist did: *The Lord has chastened me severely, but He has not given me over to death* (Psalm 118:18, NKJV). The belly of a great fish may not be a nice place to live, but it's a good place to learn. And Jonah seemed to learn a lot, he recognised the sovereignty and provision of God which caused him, at long last, to turn to God in prayer, 2:1, and that's where we'll pick it up in a couple of weeks!

"As we know Jesus better, His divine power gives us everything we need for living a godly life." 2 Peter 1:3

Man Overboard!

The amazing thing in all of this is that the sailors didn't throw Jonah into the sea the moment he was singled out by the casting of lots. It's something they didn't feel able to do - showing more compassion in the process than Jonah had shown to them earlier. The sailors' religious outlook couldn't make sense of a god of the heaven's creating and controlling the sea and so to throw Jonah overboard was equivalent to murdering him. So, vs13: ... *the men did their best to row back to land. But they could not for the sea grew even wilder than before.* And made their daring rescue attempt impossible. Where before they had cried to their gods, vs5, they now call to the Lord and cry out that they wouldn't be held guilty for Jonah's death, vs14: *O Lord, please do not let us die for taking this man's life. Do not hold us accountable for killing an innocent man, for you, O Lord, have done as you pleased.*

The sailors were dissociating themselves from Jonah's rebellion and sin. Some people see Jonah's suggestion of throwing him overboard as an expression of his guilt and an act of repentance. However, I don't see any repentance here at all. If Jonah had confessed his sin and repented, how could the sailors possibly think of him as innocent? Repentance would acknowledge guilt, but the sailors fear killing an innocent man. In calling Jonah, innocent, they weren't criticising God's actions, but rather stating that no human court had passed sentence on him.

As a result of Jonah's begrudging belief in the sovereignty of God, the sailors were brought to a realisation of His power. They seem to understand/grasp some of the basics of theology and begin to acknowledge God's sovereignty: ... *for you, O Lord, have done as you pleased.* They recognised the existence of Jonah's God; His judgement of sin; their own guilt before Him, and His sovereignty over creation. And so they threw themselves at God's mercy and then threw Jonah into the raging sea. Predictably, when Jonah's instructions are eventually obeyed, vs15: ... *the raging sea grew calm.* Vs16: *At this the men greatly feared the Lord, and they offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made vows to Him.* The sailors recognised that Jonah's God was the one true God and now they worship Him. Jonah's hypocrisy didn't stop the sailors from trusting in and obeying God's word.

You could say these heathen sailors are the heroes of our story because they practised what they knew to be God's will, while Jonah disobeyed God's command. The sailors were saved (both physically and spiritually) because they obeyed what they knew to be God's will. They had learned that their 'gods' were impostors, who couldn't answer their prayers or control the sea. They learned that the God of Israel was the Creator of heaven and earth.

God's Divine Intervention:

Jonah had tried to run away, it hadn't worked and he was now prepared to face his death through being thrown overboard. However, God had other ideas. Whilst Jonah might think he was finished with God, God certainly wasn't finished with him, he'd given Jonah a job to do and he was going to do it, and so God offer Jonah his divine protection, vs17: *the Lord provided a great fish to swallow Jonah.*

There are all sorts of schools of thought about what this great fish actually was (fish, schools - get it!). There's no suggestion that the fish was specially created for this purpose, simply that the power of God ensured that the fish was there at exactly the right time. There are many discussions about how Jonah could, or couldn't, have survived for any length of time living in a great fish/whale/shark. People argue about where Jonah could have lay and how he was preserved. Why do we have to rationalise everything in order to make the miracle seem real? Do we deny Jesus' resurrection just because there's no precedence? I don't think so. God doesn't have to have a precedent to perform a miraculous act nor does he have to do anything twice just to prove who He is.

4: Jonah acknowledges his guilt and accepts responsibility for his actions in vs11-12. What do you think Jonah's attitude is at this point?

5: How does God use this calamity to demonstrate His grace and mercy, vs15-17? Can you think of situations in your own life where God has protected you when you know your behaviour has been outside of His will?

6: What has impacted you the most as you have read/studied Jonah 1?



Is there anything you most want to put into practice as a result of this study?



The Story Of Jonah (1/4) *HG87: Jonah Runs Away From God*

Jonah 1:1-17

Home Group Sermon Notes

26th January 2014 - Revd Paul A. Carr

Introduction

The story of Jonah is probably one of the first Bible stories we learn in Sunday School, but it's a story that still has much to teach us as adults. There's not one of us who hasn't experienced the chastening of the Lord (Hebrews 12:6). We all know what it's like to be thrown overboard and swallowed up until we finally surrender and admit that God's way is right. Jonah was a prophet who forgot that a privilege it was to be able to hear God's Word, and to know something of God's heart. However, Jonah is a prophet more by what he is and does than by what he says. In fact, we would have great difficulty making a paragraph out of his prophetic messages. His words are more pathetic than prophetic - but his life and what he did, speaks volumes.

Jonah's Commission

God told Jonah, vs1-3: *Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it*, but Jonah ignores what God has to say and goes in the opposite direction to where God was calling him to go. He heads towards Tarshish, on the other side of the Mediterranean. Jonah didn't want to go to Nineveh because he knew God would have mercy on his enemies. We find something of Jonah's inner thoughts in 4:1-2: *I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity*. The Assyrians were a cruel people who had often abused Israel and Jonah's patriotism took precedence over his theology - we saw examples of that in the church in Nazi Germany and we see examples of it in places like Zimbabwe today! Jonah forgot that the will of God is expressed in his love (Psalm 33:11). Jonah didn't want to see their repentance and would rather glory in their destruction. He wasn't prepared to bless those who cursed him. The lesson God was trying to teach Jonah, and us, is that He is a God who loves to show mercy and that we, as his people, should do the same (*do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with our God*, Micah 6:8). No racial, ethnic, social or nationalistic barriers can disqualify a person both God's love and, indeed, our love - and that, just as it was for Jonah, can sometimes be a hard truth to swallow.

Sailing To Tarshish

And so Jonah boards a ship heading to Tarshish but, vs4: *the Lord sent a great wind on the sea ... a violent storm ...* The storm was no coincidence. God was no longer speaking to Jonah through His word, but through his creation. Nature obeyed when His servant didn't! And, as we go through this book, we'll see God using other parts of his creation to do His will: the fish, vs17; the vine, 4:6; the worm, 4:7 and the wind 4:8. This storm was so great that it terrified the 'old salts' and, vs4: *... the ship threatened to break up*. As a response to this the sailors, vs5: *threw the cargo into the sea* in an effort to save the ship and their own lives. At the same time, each sailor: *cried out to his own god*, for deliverance. These sailors would have worshipped gods who they thought had influence over the seas and they would have seen the storm as having deep religious significance. In fact, their cargo would have been intended as a sacrifice to appease the offended sea god.

But while the sailors frantically worked and prayed to save the ship, Jonah was oblivious to it all - he was having a siesta!

An Unscheduled Prayer Meeting!

Jonah's voyage to Tarshish might well have been the first time he'd ever been on a boat and, though he may well have been terrified, he may not have known, unlike the sailors, that anything out of the ordinary was happening. The ship's captain didn't ask Jonah to help throw the cargo overboard, instead he asked him to pray, vs6: *Get up and call on your God! Maybe he will take notice of us and we will not perish*. I'm sure the irony wasn't lost on Jonah, being asked to pray to his god when his sole reason for being there was that he was running away from God. Have you ever lost the desire to pray at times in your life? I know I have, several times. But loss of a will to pray is one of the first indications that we're far from the Lord and need to get right with Him.

The Casting Of Lots.

The lack of result from prayer, and the rarity of such storms in the sailing season (cf. Acts 27:9), made the sailors conclude that someone on board must be responsible for their predicament. And so the sailors agreed, vs7: *Come let us cast lots to find out who is responsible for this calamity*. It comes as no surprise when Jonah is singled out - and it's a further demonstration, as if any were needed, of God's sovereign control over these events. Jonah was immediately placed on trial - a kangaroo court might be a better description. However, this was no ordinary courtroom interrogation. The questions are asked, not by an eloquent barrister absorbed in the minutia of the cross examination, but by terrified sailors clinging on for their lives in the midst of a howling storm. So they asked, vs8: *... Tell us, who is responsible for making all this trouble for us? What do you do? Where do you come from? What is your country? From what people are you?* With the generosity of men who constantly risked their lives in their daily work, they wanted to know whether Jonah fully deserved his fate (cf. Acts 28:4) or whether there were extenuating circumstances that would justify their taking some risks to try to save him.

Throughout all this, Jonah had hidden his true identity. He didn't want anybody to know about his background and was ashamed to own up, but after being put on the spot, he gives an answer which was as simple as it was profound, vs9: *I am a Hebrew and I worship the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the land*. The sailors might regard Jonah's running away as reasonable, even amusing. However, they must have been amazed that Jonah would do something to displease his God. They spent their life in fear of their gods, trying to please and pacify them - here was a man doing exactly the opposite. Here is a prophet, so wilful, even the pagans are shocked (cf. 1 Corinthians 5:1). Once Jonah had said that his God was the Creator of the sea, the sailors were left in no doubt that Jonah's God is responsible for the present crisis. There was, I'm sure, more to the story than what is written, but what the sailors knew was enough to fill them with horror. Vs10: *They were terrified and asked, what have you done?*

Jonah Accepts Responsibility For His Actions:

The sailors found themselves in an unexpected position. They realised they weren't dealing with an evil criminal, but a servant who had fallen out with his god. In a culture where ritual in the service of the gods was essential, they wanted to do the will of the Lord correctly and only Jonah could guide them, vs11: *What should we do to you to make the sea calm down for us?* Jonah responded, vs12: *Pick me up and throw me into the sea ... and it will become calm. I know that it is my fault that this great storm has come upon you*. Jonah knew that God (4:20) wouldn't make the sailors pay for what had been an innocent act on their part. I think this shows that he had a far deeper understanding of God than he is often given credit for. But we must not make the mistake of calling Jonah a martyr. Martyrs die for the glory of God, but Jonah offered to die because, quite selfishly, he would rather die than obey the will of God!