

Home Group study: week beginning 27th September 2020

Jonah: The God of the Second Chance

What sort of people do you 'love to hate'? How would you react if you felt God prompting you to share your testimony with them?

Read: Jonah 3: 1-10

Discovery

In verse 3 we read the simple phrase 'Jonah obeyed the word of the Lord and went to Nineveh'. Knowing what we already know of the story so far, do you think Jonah would have obeyed the word very willingly? What sort of things do you think might have been going through Jonah's mind?

Nineveh, we read, was a 'very important city'. Excavations have shown its city walls were about seven and a half miles round and the NIV Study Bible tells us its population was about 120,000. That's about the same as Colchester today, though it seems to have been part of a larger urban area and the fact Jonah 3: 3 tells us a visit would take three days suggests it's a bit bigger than Colchester. Nineveh was soon to become the capital of Assyria and until a civil war ruined it in 612BC it became the largest city in the world. Can you recall what Tim told us about the Ninevites in the first sermon in this series? How would you feel about going to a city of that size and importance and with that reputation to tell people God was about to destroy it? How would you expect people to react to you?

But how do the Ninevites react? How do we account for such a simple message delivered by a man who had just travelled half way round the known world and been thrown up by a fish after living inside it for three days (none of us would look our most impressive under those circumstances, would we?) having such a massive impact?

Read: Acts 8: 1, 4-8

There was a deep-seated and long-held animosity between the Samaritans and the rest of the Jewish people and, as we know from other passages of scripture, they avoided contact with each other. Not only that, but it's clear both from verse 7 and by glancing forward to the passage beginning at verse 9, that there were all sorts of dark forces at work in Samaria too. What parallels can you draw between Jonah and Philip?

Understanding

In Jonah 3: 1 we read that the word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time.

What had been Jonah's reaction the first time the word of the Lord came to him?

If you asked someone to do something important and they reacted to you as Jonah had reacted to God, would you think of giving them a second chance?

We all know the wickedness, rebellion and sinfulness that goes on in our own hearts: how likely is it that God will give us a second chance when we let him down? Is it even less likely he will give us a second chance if we've let him down by being downright disobedient and having knowingly refused to follow his will?

What is the job that God gave to both Jonah and to Philip? Was either of them in a really good place to do it? We know Jonah despised the Ninevites, and culturally at least Philip would have not been warmly disposed to the Samaritans: and vice versa in both cases.

What has made their ministries so successful, against all the odds? What does that say about us, our reluctance to share the gospel and our prejudices about who think won't be willing, or even aren't deserving, to receive the gospel?

Application

It goes without saying that we are going through tough times at present. We are denied the encouragement and strength we get from meeting and worshipping together. We may well be wondering, 'where is God in all this?' Be assured, God is still who he says he is and is using these times to fulfil his purposes. Be assured too that you are still part of his purposes.

There is a strong sense that God is calling us to worship him (don't be put off from worshipping him by the fact we can't worship together in familiar ways) and to bring his word to a needy world. Many of us consider ourselves poor at sharing the gospel and giving an account of our faith. But God can take us and take our words and give us power, just as he did to Jonah and Philip.

Discuss how we can begin to take steps to become a people of power speaking truth and hope into a confused, largely godless and very needy world around us. Then pray for the power of the Spirit to release each of us into our calling.